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THE MAN WHO SAW GOD

ANTONY LINNEWEAER, O.F.M.

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SECOND EDITION
1927

"The Rich Young Man of Assisi"

THE MAN WHO SAW GOD

or

THE ASCETICISM AND MYSTICISM OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

---

by

ANTONY LINNEWEBER, O.F.M.

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"To spiritual seers religion has been the very opposite of suppressed and shackled living. It has meant life's expansion and completion, with all life's powers and possibilities unfolded and its energies aflame. It has been life's liberator, not its jailor. Its chief effect has been not repression, but release."

HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK.

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DEDICATION

To St. Francis of Assisi, who bequeathed to the world the secret of perfect joy, this small volume is affectionately dedicated, on the seven hundredth anniversary of his death, by one of his sons.

THE AUTHOR.

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BY
ANTONY LINNEWEBER, O. F. M.

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EMIL FREI,

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FOREWORD

"The Man Who Saw God," or: "The Asceticism and Mysticism of St. Francis of Assisi," was written for the Franciscan Educational Convention, held at Mount St. Francis, Floyd Knobs, Indiana, July 1, 2, 3, 4, 1926. The Friars present favored the motion that this essay appear, not only in the Annual Convention Report, but also in book-form. They furthermore considered it advisable not to make any changes in the manuscript, but to give it to the public just as it left the hands of the author.

Referring to this study of St. Francis, the Franciscan Educational Convention Report of 1926 (page 23) states: "It deserves to be made widely available, since it is profound, but popular withal, and is therefore well calculated to bring home to modern men and women the winsome example of St. Francis, that faithful follower of the God-man, and thus gain them for Christ Himself."

A. L., O.F.M.

Feast of St. Francis,
October 4, 1926.

THE MAN WHO SAW GOD

I

A COINCIDENCE

This is the eighth Educational Conference held by the Franciscan Fathers of the United States.

The topic for the 1926 Conference is ASCETICAL THEOLOGY. It is a coincidence that this subject of subjects was chosen for this year's session.

This is the seven hundredth anniversary of the death of St. Francis and hence it was appropriate to select a topic near and dear to his heart. Had any other subject been chosen, Francis would not have been the central object of interest during these days. Our Holy Father St. Francis is known as the most Christlike ascetic and mystic of history; and, therefore, it is not only becoming, but also logical to devote the first paper to "The Man Who Saw God," or "The Asceticism and Mysticism of St. Francis of Assisi."

II

AN EXPLANATION

It might be well to say a word in order to explain why the sub-title of this essay is "The Asceticism and Mysticism of St. Francis of Assisi," and not "Franciscan Asceticism and Mysticism." The reason is that there is a difference between the asceticism and mysticism of St. Francis and that of his disciples. Francis was a most unique personality, not only in the Church, but also in the Order which he founded. Up to the time of Francis, men considered it practically impossible to get beyond the spirit of the Gospel. The man of Assisi was the first one to prove that it is possible to live up to the letter of the Gospel as well. In all probability no man will ever be called by Providence to reach the heights of Gospel asceticism and mysticism attained by St. Francis.

The spirit of St. Francis was put into words, as far as such a thing can be done,

by his followers, especially by St. Bonaventure; and the system built up by these learned and saintly men is called "Franciscan Asceticism and Mysticism."

"It has been said that there was only one Christian who died on the cross; it is truer to say in this sense that there was only one Franciscan, whose name was Francis." (Chesterton, p. 215)[1]

[1] All quotations from G. K. Chesterton are from his book *"St. Francis of Assisi."* Copyright, 1924. George Doran Co., Publishers.

III

THE PARADOX OF GALILEE

The life of Jesus Christ on earth was a paradox. He was "sorrowful yet always rejoicing." The source of His joy was the Beatific Vision. The source of His sorrow was the interior and exterior sufferings of His life.

From the first moment of His existence Our Lord foresaw His whole career. Its every detail was always present to His mind and as the hour of fulfillment arrived He actually experienced the interior and exterior sufferings He had seen in vision from the beginning. "Know then, My daughter," Our Lord once said to St. Catherine of Bologna, "that from the first moment of My Incarnation I was a man of sorrows. I never lost sight of all the pains of My life, either interior or exterior, all the torments of My Passion, or My cruel and ignominious death. And because I knew, at the same time, the an-

guish which My dearest and most innocent Mother would have to suffer in them, this thought greatly aggravated the weight of My sorrow. But what put the finishing stroke and rent My heart, was the foreknowledge which I had of the ingratitude of men; how they would slight My love, making ill use of their redemption, which had cost Me such a great price, and forfeit irrevocably both grace and glory.

"Every Friday when I pictured to Myself, more forcibly and continuously, all the torments of My cruel passion, I experienced an agony still more increased by the thought that My sweetest and most amiable Mother was to witness this heart-rending sight.

"Wednesday was also a day of great bitterness to Me, because I foresaw that it would be the day on which I should say farewell to My Mother and part from her, and that My treacherous disciple would sell his soul for thirty pieces of silver. Such were, during thirty-three years, My interior sorrows caused by this contemplation which I never interrupted.

"As to the sufferings which I endured on Good Friday, no human intelligence can

comprehend them. They were such that My body could not have borne them had it not been for its close union with the Divinity."

The Beatific Vision did not, therefore, make Our Lord immune to suffering. His life was a combination of extremes—of extreme joy and extreme sorrow. Now He is rejoicing without suffering. But, as long as He was on earth the two extremes always met. His life was the divine paradox of Galilee.

IV

"FOLLOW ME"

Our Lord taught us by word, but above all, by example. His message can be put into two words: "Follow Me." When He bade us follow Him, however, He did not wish our stay upon earth to be a time of self-denial only; He wanted us to have a source of joy as well. He wished our life, like His, to be one of sorrowing, yet always rejoicing. He wanted our life to be a paradox.

St. Francis and his followers made life a paradox. They practiced extreme self-denial, yet they were never gloomy. They were the happiest of men. "The whole point about St. Francis of Assisi is that he certainly was ascetical and he certainly was not gloomy." And: "It is utterly useless to study a great thing like the Franciscan movement while remaining in the modern mood that murmurs against gloomy asceticism." (Chesterton, p. 118-119.)

V

THE PARADOX OF ASSISI

Christ was a God-man, the Innocent One, yet He was always sorrowful. We are men, the guilty ones, and we too are always sorrowful. An infinite difference! Christ was a God-man who saw God face to face in this world and always rejoiced. We are men who can see God in this world, but only by faith; an infinite difference. Christ's life was a divine paradox, while ours is a human paradox. Bellord says: "All the virtues we can conceive of existed in Our Lord in supreme perfection, except such as were incompatible with His Divinity, like repentance for personal sin, and faith."

Hence, if we want to find a model whose life was a perfect combination and blending of sorrow and of joy, of self-denial and the continual vision of God by faith, we must turn, not to Christ, the Divine Paradox, but to one who solved the problem of fol-

lowing Christ, in so far as it is possible for man to do so; we must turn to a human paradox. I have selected Francis as an ideal, not because I am a Franciscan, not because this is a Franciscan Conference, not because this is the anniversary of the death of St. Francis, but because I am forced to turn to the most perfect paradox next to that of Galilee—the paradox of Assisi.

"The Paradox of Galilee"
and
"The Paradox of Assisi"

POVERTY AND HAPPINESS

VI

"HAVING NOTHING AND POSSESSING ALL THINGS"

2 Cor. 7:10.

1. Seeing God the Father, the Creator and Preserver
2. Francis
3. A Paradox
4. The Reformer

1

Seeing God, the Father, the Creator and Preserver

The first reason for rejoicing always is that we can always see the Creator and Preserver. Where is He? He is everywhere. "Do not I fill the earth," saith the Lord. By seeing God, I mean knowing that He exists. Reason and faith enable me to see God everywhere. I raise my eyes to Heaven and behold the firmament dotted with stars. The stars I see are but a few of the countless heavenly bodies invisible to the naked eye. I read a standard work on astronomy; I read on and on with increasing interest, and as I lay the book aside, spontaneously there rises to my lips the exclamation: Verily, "the heavens show forth the glory of God and the firmament declareth the work of His hands."

I next discover that the planet on which I live is a mere speck in creation. I read of our "Palace Wonderful" and learn about the mineral, the vegetable and the animal kingdom. And as I turn from the

written story of Nature's wonders I whisper the words of the Psalmist: "O Lord, our Lord, how admirable is Thy name in the whole earth."

Not only do I see the Creator everywhere, but I see also the Preserver of the universe. I learn that it requires omnipotence not only to create a world out of nothing, but to keep it in existence and to prevent it from falling back into nothingness. And not only do I see the Creator and Preserver, but I also hear His voice. By this I mean that created things speak to me about the perfections of their Creator and Preserver. If I do not see the Creator and Preserver everywhere, I "have eyes and see not"—I am blind; and if I do not hear his voice, I "have ears and hear not"—I am deaf.

"In vain throughout each changeful year
Did nature lead him as before;
A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him
And it was nothing more."

2

Francis

Francis saw God, the Creator and Preserver, everywhere. He was not blind, nor did he go about with downcast eyes. He took in every detail of the panorama before him. He was an expert in the divine alchemy of transforming the wonders of nature into nourishment for his soul. Francis saw God in the firmament and in all inanimate things; in trees and plants, flowers and fruits. He saw Him in animals, fish and birds, and in the smallest insects. It is told of him that he picked up a worm in the road one day and carried it to a place of safety lest someone should tread on it and end its life and message. He realized that the combined efforts of all men could not produce so much as a blade of grass or restore it to life after it had withered.

Francis not only saw God, but he also heard His voice. Created things were no strangers to him. They were his brothers and sisters, and so he called them. All nature preached a sermon and he never missed a word. He heard God. Books

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interested him only in so far as they were means to know, love and serve God.

If learning is used as a means to know the Creator and Preserver better it is a great blessing. Francis realized this. He approved of scholarship for the man who had to teach. He did not consider it necessary for himself, however. He was called to preach Gospel asceticism and mysticism and these he learned and mastered in the school of Jesus Christ.

Francis not only understood creatures, but they also understood him and obeyed him. "Little sisters," he would say to the birds, "if you have now had your say, it is time that I also should be heard." They would make no sound after that and remain motionless until he had finished his discourse. They seemed to realize what had happened when death robbed them of their big brother. "At the hour of the passing of the holy man, the larks—birds that love the light, and dread the shades of twilight—flocked in great numbers unto the roof of the house, albeit the shades of night were then falling, and, wheeling round it for a long while with songs even gladder than their wont, offered their witness, alike gracious and manifest, unto the

glory of the Saint, who had been wont to call them unto the divine praises." (St. Bonaventure.)

The familiarity of Francis with created things, living and inanimate, was the nearest approach to man's condition before the Fall. If he allowed himself to become absorbed in the contemplation of the beauties of nature the result was ecstacy. A selfish man sees in a gift neither the giver nor the beauties of the gift. He sees only himself and the benefit which the gift might be to him. In fact, he fails to see almost everything about it. In like manner, a selfish man sees neither creation nor the Creator. He sees only himself, and in created things their smallest part—their practical value.

"Earth's crammed with Heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries."

(Browning.)

The unselfish man, however, sees God in creation and studies with keen interest

all the details of creation's marvels. He prays:

"Thou who hast given me eyes to see
And love this sight so fair,
Give me a heart to find but Thee,
And read Thee everywhere."
(Keble.)

3

A Paradox

Scripture calls riches the source of all evil. The Holy Spirit declares that a rich man will have to make extraordinary efforts not to succumb to the dangers of wealth. Even the lawful use of created things requires constant self-control. The acquisition, care and investment of money are a source of much anxiety and endless distraction. Francis, like his father, could have become a rich man. He could have enjoyed wealth, but he became a poor man instead by taking the vow of poverty. This meant extreme self-denial for human nature. He accepted the necessaries of life as alms, mindful of the words of the Gospel: "A laborer is worthy of his

hire." He carried out to the letter the Gospel counsels in regard to poverty. Bourdaloue confesses: "He was the most ardent, enthusiastic and desperate lover of poverty the world has ever known."

Francis took the serious step of renouncing all his possessions, but not because he thought they would be the cause of spiritual ruin to himself. He was the type of hero who would have used wealth in a manner pleasing to God. He became poor, not because he was selfish and wanted to be care-free and escape the burdens of the rich; he became poor, not because he looked upon wealth as an evil in itself; but he chose a life of poverty because it was the necessary means of removing forever every obstacle in the way of perfect vision and enjoyment of the Creator and Preserver. Francis accepted the call to devote his life to a glorious crusade. Men rested in created things instead of using them as guides to their Creator. But Francis saw, heard, praised, adored, thanked and enjoyed the Creator and Preserver and inspired men to do likewise. The distractions of a life spent in the pursuit of wealth would have made it impossible for him to become the world's great

lover of nature, the apostle of poverty and joy.

In the eyes of our Saint poverty was not a cruel robber who deprived him of everything he had and left him penniless and despondent; but a fair lady who led him into a promised land of perfect freedom. "He was as free as the wind, he was almost wildly free in relation to that world around him. The whole idea of St. Francis was that the Little Brothers should be like little fishes who could go freely in and out of that net. They could do so precisely because they were small fishes and in that sense, even slippery fishes. There was nothing that the world could hold them by; for the world catches us mostly by the fringes of our garments, the futile externals of our lives. One of the Franciscans says later, 'A Friar should own nothing but his harp,' meaning, I suppose, that he should value nothing but his song, the song with which it was his business as a minstrel to serenade every castle and cottage, the song of the joy of the Creator in His Creation and the beauty of the brotherhood of man. In imagining the life of this sort of visionary vagabond, we may already get a glimpse also of the prac-

"Having Nothing and Possessing All Things"

tical side of that asceticism which puzzles those who think themselves practical." (Chesterton, p. 150-51.)

Francis saw more and more of God every day and less and less of created things. In the end he saw only God and the nothingness from which all things are made.

Jesus Christ was the Lord of Heaven and of earth. He might have enjoyed the good things of life, but He loved and practised poverty for our sakes. He took upon Himself the burden of the world's sins, committed through the creature's abuse of the Creator's gifts. The hardships of a life of poverty foreseen and borne, day by day, in order to make reparation for men's sins against their Creator and Preserver, made Our Lord a man of sorrows; at the same time He rejoiced always because He saw God face to face. His life was a divine paradox.

Francis lived a life of extreme poverty, and therefore, a life of deprivation and extreme self-control, and self-denial. On the other hand, he saw the Creator and Preserver everywhere and always by faith. He was sorrowful, yet he always rejoiced. His life was a perfect human paradox.

He continued his mission of living and preaching poverty and happiness to the end of his life.

"It is certain that he held on to this heroic or unnatural course from the moment when he went forth in his hair-shirt into the winter woods to the moment when he desired even in his death agony to lie bare upon the bare ground, to prove that he had and that he was nothing. And we can say, with almost as deep a certainty, that the stars which passed above that gaunt and wasted corpse stark upon the rocky floor had for once, in all their shining cycles round the world of laboring humanity, looked down upon a happy man." (Chesterton, p. 119-20.)

4

The Reformer

Francis became the Reformer of his age and of mankind by demonstrating the truth of the paradox: "Having nothing and possessing all things." After living a life of poverty and enjoying the blessedness of seeing the Creator and Preserver everywhere, and of hearing His voice, he

was prepared to effectually and enthusiastically deliver his message: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." After all, men need not so much instruction, as inspiration, and the world's ideal teacher is not the brilliant man who knows and can impart theory, but the one who knows from experience and is able to communicate his message with the enthusiasm that always goes with conviction.

Francis gave up everything and found that he gave up nothing. Instead of possessing nothing, he possessed all things. He gave up all he had or might have acquired only in so far as it was a disturbance, but not in so far as it was a means to better know, love and serve God. He was the world's richest man because he was the poorest of men. All things belonged to him. He saw and enjoyed them. He gave up only the cares, the slavery, the responsibility of ownership. He could say with the poet: "The land is yours, but the landscape is mine." He dethroned the almighty idol mammon and enthroned almighty Lady Poverty. She alone is powerful enough to sweep away the obstacles which wealth places between man and the

vision and perfect enjoyment of his Maker.

Francis reminded man that he is the king of creation and that all created things belong under his feet; that the master's place is at the feet of the Creator and Preserver of all things; and his duty, joyful adoration and thanksgiving. Francis envied no man, however rich; rather, he made the wealthy envy him, the rich "Little Poor Man." He pitied the man who neither saw nor heard his Creator and Preserver more than the man who was blind and deaf.

Francis did not write a treatise on creation; neither did he write a book on the right use of created things. He taught the world by his example. He saw God and, therefore, possessed all things in so far as they served as rungs for a ladder ascending from earth to heaven. He, the son of a rich merchant, with a promising future, became a poor man by choice. He stood at the side of the God-man who had not where to lay His head; and he was proud of the distinction. All he had to say was: "Be ye followers of me as I am of Christ."

Men had to admit that he was a real reformer, that he practised and proved

what he preached with genuine enthusiasm. He loved his Lady Poverty, practised her precepts and never ceased to sing her praises. He told men that they need not go as far as he by taking the vow of poverty, but declared that they must be poor in spirit if they would see and hear and enjoy their Creator and Preserver and be happy. They must not be entirely taken up with creatures and thereby forget their Maker.

He reminded the rich man of the fundamental fact that the Invisible Creator is the one and only infinite and satisfying possession; and that His visible gifts are blessings fraught with real danger. The rich man saw no God above him. He saw only himself, and in created things, only the means of self-gratification. The poor man, likewise, failed to see the Creator. He, too, saw only himself; and in poverty, the one obstacle to happiness.

Both rich and poor did not hesitate to use unlawful means to acquire and increase their possessions. They were convinced that the sinful use of created things, because it required no control, was, to use their terminology, a foretaste of heaven; that the lawful use of created things, be-

cause it required control, a foretaste of purgatory; and that poverty, because it required perfect self-control, a foretaste of hell. Francis proved that they were wrong. He admitted that poverty means privations to fallen human nature, but not to the man of faith in us. He showed them by the convincing proof of his life, that actual poverty, or the spirit of poverty and happiness are not incompatible; that they are a paradox and not a contradiction; and that the sinful use of created things and happiness are incompatible and contradictory. He never tired of repeating the warning:

"All sin bears hidden seed of misery
However fair may be the form it wears,
However sweet may be the feast which
it prepares;
However soft its voice of flattery
E'en though it seems an angel from the
sky.
Down stooping gently, but to soothe our
cares,
And of some freer life to make us heirs,
With promise of a God-like destiny:
Still must we flee if hope of bliss be ours,
No guilty conscience ever yet was glad;

God works with all His universal powers
To make the evil doer inly sad.
A moment's joy whole years of peace devours
And who seek happiness in sin are mad."

(J. L. Spalding.)

The men of his day listened to Francis. They understood the sermon of his life and took it to heart. They became poor in spirit; many even giving up all their possessions to the poor, followed him. The echo of the sermon of his life of poverty has caught the attention of the whole world in the centuries which have since elapsed, and the praises of his irresistible Lady Poverty, together with his happy life, will continue to resound in the ears and hearts of men till the end of time.

"The whole point of him was that the secret of recovering the natural pleasures lay in regarding them in the light of a supernatural pleasure." (Chesterton, p. 104.)

Francis was happy, unspeakably happy and free, and he could not tolerate unhappiness and slavery. "It is only the devil and his followers," he declared, "who

ought to be sad, and we, on the contrary, should always rejoice."

When he met an unhappy man he said: "Friend, go to Confession. Man is the only creature endowed with intelligence and free will; he is the only one who has the power to disturb the harmony of the universe. If you have used the Creator's gifts in His very presence to offend Him, repent, ask forgiveness, and then return and join the mighty chorus of Creation in its harmonious hymn of praise, adoration, and thanksgiving."

We shall never succeed in our work of reform, in our efforts to induce men to break with sin and to use God's gifts according to His Holy Will; we shall never inspire men to renounce all to follow Christ and Francis and Lady Poverty, if we speak only of the hardships of such a life. We must be poor and happy and thereby preach the whole Gospel. We must preach poverty as a means of seeing and enjoying God. We must preach the Gospel paradox, "Having nothing and possessing all things." We must be fearless in our deductions from first principles; and with spirit and confidence, our voices must ring out, reminding men that God is which

IS, and that outside of Him there is nothing but darkness, disorder, negation and utter boredom. We need, today, reformers who will preach and practice the Gospel as taught and practised by Christ and His human interpreter, the Poor Man of Assisi.

Francis was the poorest and yet the richest of men. He was as nothing and possessed nothing, and yet He possessed Him who is All, and in Him all created things in so far as they were means to see God, to love and serve Him in this world, and thereby to deserve to possess and enjoy Him forever in Heaven.

"The sun-tipped clouds, the stars above,
A thousand things that glow and shine,
A million symbols of God's love
Now are and ever will be mine."

VII

"NEVER LESS ALONE THAN WHEN ALONE"

1. Seeing God, the Son, Our All
2. Francis
3. A Paradox
4. The Reformer

1

Seeing God, the Son, Our All

The second reason for rejoicing always is the vision and enjoyment of God, the Son, our All. But where shall we find Him? As God, He is present everywhere. As God-man, He is present on earth only in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. How can we see Him? By faith. "Faith is the evidence of things that appear not." By faith we can see our Lord in the Sacrament of His Love; by faith and hope and love we can lead a life of constant union with Him. He is the Vine, we are the branches. By faith we can see Christ who was born of Mary once and in one place; by faith we can see Him born again, as it were, today, in countless places every moment of the day and night.

"Five whispered words from his trembling lips
The priest, in awe, commands,
And Mary's Babe of Bethlehem
Is cradled in his hands."

"Not less doth God seem to do when He deigneth to descend daily from heaven upon our Altars, than He did when He assumed human nature and became incarnate." (St. Bonaventure.)

Jesus Christ wanted the Bloody Sacrifice of Calvary to continue in an unbloody manner to the end of time. At the Last Supper He showed His Apostles how this was to be done. He consecrated bread and wine and told them to do what they had just seen Him do for a commemoration of Him. The Apostles and their successors have carried out His command to this day, and they will continue to consecrate bread and wine until the end of time. There are several hundred thousand Catholic priests in the world today, and since Holy Mass is offered up in the morning, there is not a moment of the day or night when, owing to the difference of time in different parts of the world, Christ is not being born again somewhere upon our altars. He is born again to offer Himself to His Heavenly Father as an infinitely perfect sacrifice of adoration, thanksgiving, propitiation and petition. He is born again to be our spiritual food and drink, to bless us at Benediction, and

finally, to be our All in the Tabernacle. He is present in the Tabernacle to receive our visits or to visit us when we are no longer able to visit Him. Thus are being literally fulfilled the words of the Prophet: "From the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same, My name is great among the Gentiles; and in every place there is sacrifice and there is offered to My name a clean oblation, for My name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of Hosts."

We can not only see our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament by faith, we can also hear His voice repeating the paradoxical invitation: "If any man will come after Me let him deny himself;" and: "I will refresh you." Verily there is no nation "that hath gods so nigh them as our God is present to all our petitions." We have the Real Presence, the rest of the world has the real absence—an infinite difference.

2

Francis

St. Francis saw God the Son, his All, in the Blessed Sacrament. From the be-

ginning of his conversion he was interested in churches, the earthy homes of Jesus Christ. He was not interested in monasteries. The Friar, unlike the Monk of old, was to mingle freely with the world. His protection was to be not the enclosure, but the knowledge, love and service of Jesus Christ; his safety, a life of union with Jesus in the midst of the distractions of the world; his home, the Church where Jesus Christ was present. Francis had no objection to buildings and the enclosure, if they became necessary to keep people out; but he realized that they were no cure if they became necessary to keep the Friar in to save him from the world's corruption.

Francis devoted his time to the restoration of neglected churches. Heaven was calling him to restore the Church, but he thought the call meant to restore crumbling church buildings. When he found a neglected church or chapel he gave it a thorough cleaning and decorated its altars. He loved cleanliness. It was the luxury of the poor in which he indulged and he wanted his Friars to indulge in the same luxury. If Francis was solicitous about the buildings in which Christ dwelt, he was, needless to say, far more concerned about

the sacred vessels. "Let all those," he declared, "who administer such most holy mysteries, especially those who do so indifferently, consider among themselves how poor the chalices, corporals and linens may be where the Body and Blood of our Lord is sacrificed." He wanted the churches in charge of the Friars to be simple and clean so that the poor could come and pray and enjoy visits with their All, without the worry of maintaining elaborate houses of worship.

Francis had the greatest reverence for priests. He claimed that he would greet a priest before an angel, because to the priest of the New Law was given powers not given to the angel; because, as he put it, priests alone consecrate and administer all that we see of the Most High Son of God in this world. Francis did not become a priest, he remained a deacon. As such, he could assist the officiating priest at the Altar; he could distribute Holy Communion; he could preach the Word of God. We do not know just why he did not become a priest, but it is certain it was not for selfish motives.

St. Francis intended to found a contemplative order of men, who, by prayer,

penance and holiness would make amends to God for the world's neglect of these most sacred obligations. But at the command of Christ Himself, he established an order of men who combine the active and contemplative life and thus walk in the footsteps of the Holy One, Jesus Christ, "Who went about doing good." Francis did not lead the active life of a priest, nor did he lead the contemplative life of a lay-brother. He led the life of a deacon; he became the General of the Order he founded, and spent his leisure time at the foot of the Altar, and there became the Saint of Love, the Seraph of Assisi. Francis always remained a contemplative at heart.

"Desire for foreign travel," he might have exclaimed, "please reflect on this point which is a platitude of platitudes, that in possessing Christ you possess the Lord, the Creator of Heaven and earth, and that when you are in the Presence of Him who thought and loved you into being, there is no sight or sound that you do not possess in the chapel." (R. H. Benson)

3

A Paradox

The Creator divided the race into two groups—men and women. In the beginning He gave them the command to increase and multiply. Woman is, therefore, man's mate in the sublime calling of giving life to children. The marriage contract, under the New Law, binds the contracting parties for life. "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder." Ideal married life is wonderful. But not all are obliged to enter the matrimonial state. "There are eunuchs who were born from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made so by men; and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven." Scripture, referring to the last class adds: "He that can take let him take it."

Ideal women are rare. "Who shall find a valiant woman, far and from the uttermost coast is the price of her."

Francis might have gone in quest of such a woman. He might have become

one of the greatest human lovers of history. He became a eunuch for the Kingdom of Heaven, however; he took the vow of chastity. He thereby became incapable of contracting a valid marriage by the law of the Church. By this vow he furthermore pledged himself to observe perfect chastity of body and mind, so that every act committed contrary thereto would constitute a double sin. "The troubadour who said that love set his heart on fire separated himself from women." (Chesterton, p. 16) This meant the extreme of self-denial for human nature, for a loving, passionate nature like his. St. Alphonsus calls the Sixth Commandment the "difficult Commandment" and claims that the violation of this law of God in thought, word and deed has been the ruin of more souls than the violation of any other.

Francis realized that it was in him to become a seraph of love; but he realized as well, that he was a man with a fallen nature, and if he allowed himself to drift, that it was in him to become a libertine.

Francis avoided the occasions of sin; he kept his "brother ass," as he called his body, in subjection. He did not take the vow of chastity, however, because he

feared that he would become a victim of lust without it: "Woe to him that is alone," did not apply to him, as we shall see; nor did he take the vow in order to escape the trials of married life, nor because he was selfish or cowardly. He did not choose a life of chastity for its own sake. He took the vow as a means to an end. It was the necessary means to remove completely the last obstacle in the way of the vision and perfect enjoyment of Jesus Christ, his All. "He that is without wife is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God. But he that is with wife is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided."

Francis saw and enjoyed the vision of Christ, his All. And seeing Him, it is not surprising that he accepted the proposal of Jesus Christ, his All, to accept Him as the Bridegroom of his soul. "A man can not even begin to see the sense of a story that may well seem to him a very wild one, until he understands that to this great mystic his religion was not a thing like a theory, but a thing like a love affair." (Chesterton, p. 22.)

Bride of Jesus Christ, our All! This

is the greatest dignity next to that of being His Mother. From the moment of his nuptials with his Love and his All, Jesus Christ, Francis considered his life on earth exile. Heaven became the home for which he sighed; the foot of the Altar his trysting place; life, the one and only opportunity of loving Christ and being loyal to Him, and of living a life of union with Him, the Invisible One, in the midst of created beauty and loveliness, before seeing Him face to face.

How the world lamented the loss of that great lover, Francis. How it pitied him for foregoing the greatest thrill it knows—the thrill of human love. The world did not know of the invisible, the infinitely perfect, divine and human Lover he had found. "It knows that romantic love is a reality, but it does not know that divine love is a reality." (Chesterton, p. 163) What a pity it is that most men live and die without reading those most fascinating of books, the works on asceticism and mysticism, which describe in detail the love experiences of those who saw and heard Christ and accepted Him as their Bridegroom.

"The conjugal tenderness of Hector and

Andromache, the unwearied fidelity of Penelope awaiting through the long revolving years the return of her storm-tossed husband. . . the heroic love of Alcestis, voluntarily dying that her husband might live; the filial piety of Antigone; the majestic grandeur of the death of Polyxena; the more subdued and saintly resignation of Iphigenia, excusing with her last breath the father who had condemned her; the joyous modest and loving Nausicaa, whose figure shines like a perfect idyll among the tragedies of the Odyssey—all these are pictures of perennial beauty, which Rome and Christendom, chivalry and modern civilization, have neither eclipsed nor transcended."

What a surprise it would be for a man like Lecky, who makes this statement in his History of European Morals to learn that the thrill Francis experienced in one single night at the foot of the Altar, far exceeded the combined thrills of all human lovers who ever lived or ever will live. Francis spent whole nights in church in a state of ecstacy, unable to suppress the cry: "My God and my All!" He gave up the companionship of one ideal woman, only to find Christ waiting for him with

open arms, and in Christ, all the Christ-like men and women of history. He gave up nothing and found everything. He gave up the finite and found the Infinite. He needed no pity; he was "never less alone than when alone." He gladly relinquished what the man who is blind and deaf spiritually makes so much of—sensual gratification. Sex to him was a servant for whom he had no use and whom he dismissed. "The moment sex ceases to be a servant, it becomes a tyrant. There is something dangerous and disproportionate in its place in human nature, for whatever reason; and it does really need a special purification and dedication." (Chesterton, p. 41)

The man, who for a clearly seen reason, freely controls himself is not trampling on a good thing, he is merely subordinating it to a better thing which he wants more; just as a man, however hearty his appetite may be, will freely and gladly and easily forego food and drink before a race in which he wants to win the honors and the prize. He would call anyone a fool who said he was trampling on his instincts for food and drink. It is evident that Francis, the lover of Jesus Christ, would never again be permitted to love a

human creature with conjugal love; but it is equally evident that his vows did not prevent his loving men and women who shared his ideals, as friends in Christ.

Francis was a friend of St. Clare, and St. Clare a friend of Francis.

"In such friendships as these," writes Father Arsenius, O.F.M., "external beauty of the body plays no part at all, it is only the soul that loves. . . . Such truly spiritual friendships are rare and a great grace from God, and they suppose an already high degree of perfection. There is no fear of their becoming attached to others. They would rather see everything perish than give one fibre of their heart to creatures. They love God only and love nothing outside of Him, and themselves only because they are His. It is a very sublime state, which perhaps, I do not state very clearly, though God gives me the grace to understand it."

"If a man may well doubt whether he is worthy to write a word about St. Francis, he will certainly want words better than his own to speak of the friendship of St. Francis and St. Clare. I have often remarked that the mysteries of this story are best expressed symbolically in certain

silent attitudes and actions. And I know no better symbol than that found by the felicity of popular legend, which says that one night the people of Assisi thought the trees and the holy house were on fire, and rushed up to extinguish the conflagration. But, they found all quiet within, where St. Francis broke bread with St. Clare at one of their rare meetings, and talked of the love of God. It would be hard to find a more imaginative image for some sort of utterly pure and disembodied passion, than that red halo around the unconscious figures on the hill; a flame feeding on nothing and setting the very air on fire." (Chesterton, p. 165-66)

Francis did not spend his life in a monastery. He lived in the world; he mingled with men. He was safe in the midst of danger, because he saw Christ always; because he led a life of perfect union with Him; because he saw in creatures only what Christ gave them and nothing besides, save the nothingness from which they were made.

Francis passed the lovely mansions of his former associates; but the most fortunate and happy men of Assisi only served to make him think of his infinitely

"Never Less Alone than when Alone"

greater good-fortune. Happy men and women in their homes only made him think of Jesus Christ, his Lover and his All; they made him think of heaven, his home, because the home of Jesus Christ.

All this is a perfect mystery to the man who does not see or hear, to the man without faith; but it was no mystery to Francis, the Seraph of Love.

Jesus Christ loved chastity. He chose a virgin for a Mother, a virgin for a foster-father, a virgin for His favorite among the Apostles. Christ is a virgin and gives a lover's love only to His chosen brides; and being infinite, He gives Himself to each as if he or she were the only one. He promised a special reward in Eternity to those who have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ took upon Himself the debt of the world's sins of lust. The vision of these sins and the agony He had to endure because of them were ever before His mind. He was sorrowful indeed. At the same time He saw God and rejoiced always. His life was a divine paradox.

Francis led a life of chastity, a life of extreme self-denial for human nature. On the other hand, this life enabled him to

see and enjoy, without disturbance, Christ, his All, and his Lover. His life was a perfect human paradox.

4

The Reformer

Francis became the reformer of his age and a world-reformer by demonstrating the truth of the paradox: "Never less alone than when alone." A man of Francis' ardent temperament, neither a priest nor a lay-brother, but a deacon who concentrated his affections for a life-time on divine and human objects of love, in a way which calls for no restraint, became, as we might expect, a burning seraph of love. After enjoying for years the freedom which a life of chastity alone can give, and as a result, the blessedness of seeing and enjoying the vision of Christ; after hearing His voice day by day from the Tabernacle and in his heart, he was prepared to proclaim his message: "Blessed are the clean of heart." He gave up for life the privilege a man may enjoy of life-long companionship with an ideal woman in a home. He found, however, that just

as poverty gave him all things and deprived him of nothing worth having, so chastity gave him the God-man, Jesus Christ, his All, and in Him all ideal men and women of all times, for time and for eternity.

Francis no doubt thought, as we are apt to think when the time for complete renunciation arrives, that he was about to lose everything and retain but a lonely life of self-denial until called to his eternal reward. But he found that he had given up human companionship only in so far as it is a disturbance. He found Christ and friends in Christ, and forfeited nothing worth having. Francis found kindred souls in his first companions.

He found a kindred soul in Clare. This resulted in one of those wonderful friendships of history which have ever been a refutation of the world's claim that such an angelic union between man and woman is an impossibility. Friendship is not a matter of choice. It is something that takes place automatically once there is certainty that there exists no obstacle to ideal union with others in Christ. Christ, Who is our All, was the Bridegroom of

St. Francis' soul; He was the Bridegroom of Clare. Both lived up to the letter and spirit of the Gospel; both led a life of extreme self-denial and of extreme joy. Their paradoxical lives were alike in every respect. After meeting Clare, and making certain that for her as for himself "to live was Christ and to die was gain," Christ became the bond of union between them; and the Divine bond remained because they never attempted to substitute it for one merely human.

Souls have a closer kinship than blood owns—
As to the ear sweet sound, and light to eyes,
So to the soul, a soul that trembling flies
And blends with it, like soft, accordant tones.

Their thoughts, their hopes, their loves, their tender moans
Unite and make celestial harmonies;
To their deep yearnings come the same replies,
And love for every fault with each atones.

Communion in the best is strongest tie,
The bond that binds the lower self is weak,
And custom will the easy knot untie;
The love that lives upon a blooming cheek
With the swift fading bloom will quickly die,
And deathless love man in the soul must seek. (J. L. Spalding)

Francis had no reason to envy any man. He had the pure joys of divine and human love, without the disturbing elements which follow in the wake of conjugal love. He was a happy man—supremely happy; and those who met him could not but envy his good fortune. He did not write a treatise on Jesus Christ, our All, Who, as God is present everywhere, and as God and Man in the Blessed Sacrament; he did not write a work on chastity. He demonstrated by his life that a man who, by the vow of chastity, had chosen Jesus Christ, our All, as his Lover, is not the loneliest of men, but a man who is "never less alone than when alone." He delivered his powerful sermon of example. He, who might have become one of the world's greatest human lovers, now a virgin, stood at the side of the virgin Christ,

and was proud of the distinction. "Be ye followers of me," he could say, "as I am of Christ." He loved and lived a life of chastity; he was a genuine reformer. He had found a cure for loneliness that worked.

You need not follow me, he said to his fellowmen, to the extent of taking the vow of chastity. Enter the sublime state of matrimony if you will, but remember that the companionship of one who is finite and mortal can not be a real and lasting cure for one who must ever remain restless until he rests in God. He reminded those who were alone and thought this the one cause of their unhappiness that they were mistaken. Men are convinced that free love, because it requires no control, must be a foretaste of heaven; that union between one man and one woman, because it requires control, must be a foretaste of purgatory; and that a life of chastity, because it requires perfect self-control, a foretaste of hell. But Francis proved that they were all wrong. He admitted that this is true as far as fallen human nature is concerned, but that it is anything but the case as far as the man of faith in us is concerned.

Francis was a successful reformer because he brought out the dominant feature of sex-education—namely, self-control, as a means,—a small price for the perfect vision and enjoyment of Jesus Christ, our All.

"The principal, dominating feature of sex education should not be an explanation of sex functions, but an introduction to the inexhaustible power of the human spirit and its capacity for dominating the animal nature and controlling its demands." (Prof. F. W. Foerster.)

Francis showed by the convincing proof of his life that chastity or the legitimate use of sex, in the case of those who make the matrimonial contract, and happiness, are not incompatible. They are a paradox, not a contradiction, and that, on the other hand, lust and happiness are incompatible and a contradiction. Pascal declares: "The true good should be such that all may possess it at once and without diminution and without envy, and that which none can lose against his free will." This good is Jesus Christ and the companionship of Jesus Christ. But, since men are spiritually blind and deaf and do not see or hear Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament and

do not live a life of union with Him, the world is full of unspeakably lonely men and women, trying to distract themselves in order to forget.

"Oh that pitiful cry of the human heart for God! The shriek of the drowning mariner, the sobbing of lonely women at night, the tears of little children, the silent weeping of strong men—all the miseries that well up in one unceasing Jeremiad from the bruised heart of humanity, are a chorus of jubilates, hallelujahs, compared to this. Stifle it, O philosophers, under the cumbrous phraseology of your inconsistent and puerile systems, bury it deep down under the cyclopedian masonry of your definitions and answers; you can no more quench that eternal and pitiful cry in the heart of humanity than you can check the action of wind and wave or quench with your feeble breath the star galaxies of Heaven." (Canon Sheehan)

The men who see no Creator above them, who see only themselves; those who see in created things not means to know, love and serve God, but means of self-gratification, these same men fail to see their one companion in this world, Jesus Christ, who said, "I am the beginning and

the end." They see only themselves and in their fellow men, not fellow-companions of Jesus Christ, our All, but companions made to end their loneliness and to satisfy their craving for companionship. Lonely man turns to his lonely mate in the great work of perpetuating the race; he seeks relief and contentment and satisfaction in the companionship of a woman, but she can not cure his loneliness; the venture is bound to end in disappointment. What is a finite creature? Nothing—and if God should withdraw His Hand for a moment, a finite creature would fall back into the nothingness from which she came. We are only what God made us. We are gifts of God. To love anyone with well ordered love is to love God indirectly, to love the Giver in His gift. Well-ordered love is no disappointment for it makes it possible for us to see and enjoy both the Giver and the gift. But inordinate love is a disappointment because a creature can not fill a vacancy which Christ alone can fill. A mere nothing can not fill a heart which has a capacity for the Infinite. The companionship of man leaves an infinite void. To try to satisfy the craving of the human heart for All with nothing is the

height of folly. Jesus Christ, not a woman, is man's companion. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." He is the One for Whom the human heart is craving, and He, and He alone, can fill and satisfy it completely.

"Life without Thee must ever lonely be—
Aloneness is not loneliness with Thee."

Jesus is not a finite gift, but the Infinite Giver. And since men see and hear only themselves, and in their fellowmen see and hear only a means to cure their loneliness, and not lovers of Christ, our All, men turn to women for the companionship they ought to seek in Christ, and in Him alone. The inevitable result is disillusionment. If disappointment would only lead them to Christ as it did St. Augustine and make them exclaim, "Oh Beauty! ever ancient and ever new, too late have I loved Thee," all would be well. But many think their mistake lay in their choice, and hence, they turn to a second companion with the same result. If they could associate with all the women that ever lived, the result would be the same. "The human heart is restless until it rests in Thee." Men asso-

ciate with women with the idea of finding companionship, but since Christ is not the bond of union, that which began in the spirit is likely to end in the flesh. The dissipation of lust becomes the lowest, the most absorbing means of forgetting the unsatisfied longing for the highest. It relieves only for the moment. The reaction inevitably sets in, and the cry becomes more intense than ever. The agony of guilt and loneliness combined becomes more than man can bear. Many end as physical and moral wrecks, in whom the craving for companionship of Him, who is ALL, all but dies at last. The very ones who were called, like St. Francis, to become great lovers of Christ, become less than the lowest of men; they become less than the beasts of the field. "If man ceases to follow the track of love, if he breaks away from his only true magnet, God, he will become a wreck, whirling helplessly to destruction." (B. Vaughn, S.J.)

Men turn not only to women, but to other means of forgetting. They find distractions, but no relief. They say that it would drive them insane to be alone; and hence they make their lives a round of distractions and dissipation. But the re-

action becomes so intense that it is evident why men and women resort to the excessive use of artificial means to relieve the nervous tension.

"All need Thee, even they that know Thee not, and they that know it not need Thee far more than they that know it. The famished man imagines that he needs bread, and Thou art He for whom he hungers; he that is thirsty thinks that he wants water while he thirsteth after Thee; he that is sick believes himself to long for health though his sickness is Thine absence; he that seeks beauty seeks Thee unconsciously, the complete and perfect Beauty; he whose mind pursues truth, desires Thee without knowing it, who art the only Truth worthy to be known; and he who runs breathlessly after peace seeks Thee, the only peace wherein most unquiet hearts can rest. These call Thee without knowing that they call Thee, and their cry is unutterably more pitiful than ours." (Papini)

They say that a genius is usually eccentric and sad. But if he is, it is not because he is a genius. He is more restless than the average person because the desire for Jesus Christ is more intense, on the one

hand, and the agony and loneliness keener on the other, if he finds Him not. If a genius finds Jesus Christ, he will, like Francis, become the most normal and happiest of men. He will not only find Christ, but he, and he alone will make a perfect success of his work. It will be the overflow of a soul that has found all, and is satisfied, not the product of an infinitely lonely man who has not found and who is seeking in vain.

"We have to assume throughout, needless to say, that Francis was a poet and could only be understood as a poet. But he had one poetic privilege denied most poets. In that one respect indeed, he might be called the one happy poet among all the unhappy poets of the world. He was a poet whose whole life was a poem. He was not so much a minstrel singing his own songs as a dramatist capable of acting the whole of his own play. The things he said were more imaginative than the things he wrote. The things he did were more imaginative than the things he said. His whole course through life was a series of scenes in which he had a sort of perpetual luck in bringing things to a beautiful crisis." (Chesterton, p. 130-131)

Francis did not expect men to spend whole nights at the foot of the Altar. But he did expect men to understand that finite men can not be an end or their All. He expected them to realize that man is nothing; that Jesus Christ is the only one in this whole world who is not nothing, Who is everything, Who is All. He expected men to love and serve Christ for His own sake and for what He had done for them. He expected them to realize that they are sons of God and brothers of Christ, and that Christ their Brother, is awaiting them in Heaven, that He is present in the Blessed Sacrament to refresh them on their way to their eternal home. He expected them to lead a life of union with Jesus Christ, because He is the Vine and they are the branches; and vine and branches must be one to live and thrive and bear abundant fruit. He expected men to enjoy the companionship of their fellow-creatures only in Christ; which means, not for their own sake, but because they are gifts of God, and if used rightly, means to know, love and serve the Giver. He expected them to realize what the Church is —the earthly home of Jesus Christ, their All, the place to which they must come

from time to time to seek and find genuine refreshment.

After a series of conferences on "Jesus Christ, my Friend," a man of fifty wrote: "Found—a friend I always knew I had, but never knew how to find Him. Loneliness has been the cause of all my sins, but I know my friend now and I shall never be lonely again." Think of it! Finding Christ only after the best part of his life was gone.

Francis spoke to men about Christ as the One who proved His love by deeds, by dying for them, by becoming their food in the Blessed Sacrament, by ascending into heaven to prepare a place for them. He introduced them to Christ as the One who loved each one as completely as if he or she had been the only object of His love; he made Christ irresistible. He knew that once they became interested in Him and loved Him for what He had been, was and would be to them, they would gradually realize what He is in Himself, and love and serve Him, not so much for selfish motives, but above all because of what He was in Himself—perfect God and perfect Man.

"Observe," says St. Augustine, "that

the heart's love is partly carnal; it is affected through the flesh of Christ and what He said and did while in the flesh. Filled with this love, the heart is readily touched by discourse on His works and acts. It hears of nothing more willingly, reads nothing more carefully, recalls nothing more frequently, meditates upon nothing more sweetly. When man prays, the sacred image of the God-man is with him, as He was born or suckled, as He taught or died, rose from the dead or ascended to Heaven. This image never fails to move man's mind with virtue, cast out vices of the flesh and quell its lusts. I deem the principal reason why the invisible God wished to be seen in the flesh, and, as Man, held intercourse with men, was that He might draw the affections of carnal men, who could only love carnally, to a salutary love of His flesh and then on to a spiritual love."

There are those who lead pure, holy lives—lives spent in the service of Christ without ever having really found Him, seen Him or heard Him, their All. Their lives are lives of great self-denial and heroism, but they are not enjoying the refreshment to which they are entitled; they are sorrowful, but they are not at the same

time rejoicing. Their lives are not a paradox. Their lives could be made so happy.

We shall be messengers of the joy and peace of lovers of Christ only if we draw our message, not from books, but like Francis, from experience. We shall preach self, if we are full of self; we shall preach Jesus Christ, if we are full of Jesus Christ —if He fills our hearts. We shall never succeed in our efforts to induce men to give up dissipation, especially the most absorbing form of dissipation—lust; we shall never succeed in our efforts to induce men to lead chaste lives according to their state of life, if we speak only of self-denial. If we speak only of the necessity of denying ourselves, we are not preaching the whole Gospel, we are preaching only a part of it. We must live and preach the Gospel paradox; we must speak of self-denial as a means of removing the obstacles in the way of the vision of Jesus Christ, of the intense joy of the conscious comanionship of Him who is our All.

Francis was the Reformer of his age; he is a world-reformer because he preached his message in a way no man could fail to grasp, no one could refute. He preached the effective sermon of example. It demonstrated that a man is "never less alone

than when alone." The lesson he lived and taught so well can be summed up in the words:—

"Friendship with God, with all which this involves, was the final object for which there was created mankind in general and the individual soul in particular. If this is forfeited or unattained, all else is lost; no achievement or victories or possessions mean anything apart from this; no human relationships, ties or affections but end in disappointment and misery unless the Divine Friendship sanctions and fulfills them." (R. H. Benson.)

In a word, the duty of every man, woman and child is to find Christ and to know Him and to love Him and to lead a life of union with Him who is present on our altars; to exclaim: "What have I in Heaven? And besides Thee what do I desire upon earth? For Thee my flesh and my heart hath fainted away. Thou art the God of my heart and the God that is my portion forever, for behold, they that go from Thee shall perish."

"My God, my All," he murmured, and yearned for nought beside.
He lived on love of Jesus, and 'twas of love he died."

VIII

OBEDIENCE AND VICTORY

"An obedient man shall speak of victory."
Prov. 21-23.

1. Seeing God, the Holy Ghost. (The external mission of the Holy Ghost)
2. Francis
3. A Paradox
4. The Reformer

1

Seeing God, the Holy Ghost

(The External Mission of the Holy Ghost)

The third reason for rejoicing always is the vision and enjoyment of God, the Holy Ghost. Where is He? He is present in a special manner in the Church. His work in the Church is called the external mission of the Holy Ghost. By seeing the Holy Ghost I mean knowing by faith that He is in the Catholic Church. The one true Church has divine life; she is the Bride of Jesus Christ. As our Lord was the only Divine Person on earth, so the Church is the only divine institution on earth, through which the Holy Spirit guides men to Heaven. She will last to the end of time. The gates of hell shall not prevail against her. Men tried to do away with Jesus; they have tried to do away with the Church. But, like the risen Christ, the Catholic Church is immortal. She will endure to the end of time.

We not only see the Holy Spirit in the Church; we also hear His voice. He speaks to us and guides us through the Church. "I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Catholic Church." We are not at sea. We are not without a sure guide. We have an infallible Mother, who takes us by the hand and will not allow us to go astray. We know what to believe, what to do, what means of strength to use. We are never alone from the time we are born till we close our eyes in death. It is our own fault if we lose our way on our pilgrimage from earth to Heaven. A man who does not see or hear the Holy Spirit in His Church is blind and deaf, a wanderer, without a guide, on the face of the earth.

2

Francis

St. Francis saw the Holy Spirit in the Church. To him she was the immortal bride of Jesus Christ, divinely beautiful, without spot or blemish. His great boast

was that he was a Catholic. He turned to the Church for guidance. He did not attempt to shape his own career. His work was to prepare for his mission; and the work of his Guide, to direct his steps. He wanted always to be in that place and engaged in that work for which he had been selected by Providence from all eternity. He obeyed those in authority because the Holy Spirit spoke through them. During the trying transition period, when he broke with the world, he asked and followed the advice of his ecclesiastical superiors. We know from his biographers that he never went astray in spite of the extraordinary life and work to which Heaven called him.

When the group of his first followers was very small, he set out for Rome to obtain from the Holy Father his sanction upon the project of founding a new Order in the Church of God.

Humanly speaking, it was folly for a youth who had become a nobody to present himself at the court of the Pope in order to obtain his consent to inaugurate a movement more extreme than any other in the history of the Church. But Francis had no misgivings. He set out for Rome

to see the Holy Spirit and to hear His voice in the person of His representative. He was convinced that the work of God, entrusted to him, would not—could not fail; for he thought of the small but successful group of simple men sent to establish the Catholic Church in different parts of the world, the Apostles who had been chosen to preach the Gospel to every creature.

As was to be expected, the Holy Father sent the youth away. It was then that the Holy Spirit, in an extraordinary way, revealed to the Father of Christendom that the beggar whom he had turned away was the one chosen to reform the Church and the world.

As General of the Order, Francis declared that he would gladly obey a novice of one hour if he were made his guardian. It is evident that a man who spoke thus no longer saw and heard a man, but only the Divine Guide behind the superior; it it clear that he heard, not the voice of a creature, but the call of God.

Francis did not give his brethren a long and detailed rule of life. He gave them a short rule which contains the essence of the letter and spirit of the Gospel. Detailed regulations which have, in the course

of centuries, become almost necessary, are not contrary to the spirit of St. Francis, so long as we see the Holy Spirit behind them; so long as they are a means to preserve uniformity in the matter of discipline; so long as we realize that the law presupposes men who see and hear God and are grateful for detailed directions upon the narrow path of Heaven. The Gospel, the rule of his superiors—these were the guides which led St. Francis safely over roads beset with many dangers. "And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I ought to do; but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I ought to live according to the model of the Holy Gospel."

At a General Chapter, we are told, certain brethren had persuaded the Cardinal Bishop of Ostia to advise Francis to follow their counsel and had adduced certain examples from the monastic rule of St.Benedict and others. When the Cardinal related these matters to him, the Blessed Francis answered nothing, but he appeared with the Cardinal before the assembled brethren and spoke to the brothers in the fervor and power of the Holy Spirit:

"My Brothers, my Brothers, the Lord called me in the way of simplicity and humility and showed me in truth this way for myself and for those who wish to believe and imitate me, and therefore, I desire you will not name any rule to me, either that of St. Benedict or of St. Augustine or of St. Bernard or of any other rule or model of living except that which is mercifully given and shown me by the Lord, and the Lord said that he wished me to be a New Covenant in the world and did not wish us to live by any other way save by that knowledge."

"Love God," St. Augustine said, "and do as you please." St. Francis was convinced that if we love God we shall walk in the footprints of Him who was "Obedient unto death, even unto the death of the cross"; that we shall obey the Commandments, the Rule, our superior, the voice of conscience, and that all other regulations will be most welcome, not because they are necessary for us, but because they embody the experience of centuries and save us the difficult and slow task of drawing up for ourselves a detailed norm of conduct. As Francis put it, "They may be said to be killed by the letter, who give

themselves merely to its exterior observance." When it became evident to St. Francis and those who made known to him the will of the Holy Spirit, that he ought to retire, he resigned the office of General of the Order and obeyed in all things the Brother placed over him. At the end of his career, he could look back upon a life in which God always had his way. Like Christ, his model, he looked up to his Heavenly Father and prayed, "And now glorify Thou me, Father; I have glorified Thee upon earth, I have finished the work Thou gavest me."

Francis had no quarrel with the clergy for the simple reason that he refused to become a partaker in misunderstandings. He won the good will of clergy and people. Even behind opposition he saw the Holy Spirit permitting all for the good of the brethren. "My brothers," he said, "we are sent to aid the clergy in the salvation of souls, and what is found lacking in them should be supplied by us. Know, Brothers, that the gain of souls is most pleasing to God, and this we may win better by peace with the clergy than by discord. If they hinder the salvation of the people, vengeance is God's and He will repay in

time. So be ye subject to the prelates and take heed on your part that no jealousy arise. If ye are sons of peace ye shall gain both clergy and people, and this will be more acceptable to God than to gain the people alone by scandalizing the clergy. Cover their slips and supply their deficiencies; and when ye shall have done this be ye the more humble."

3

A Paradox

Countless men and women are lost or fail to accomplish the work for which they were predestined because they go through life with no guide but themselves and their own selfish will. The Holy Spirit is our Guide and He speaks to us through the Holy Catholic Church. The number of Catholics in any age is comparatively small, and how many of those who are subjects of the Church allow her to take them by the hand in order to lead them step by step on their way to Heaven? The Church does not interfere with our liberty; she helps us to use the gift of gifts, free will, rightly.

Liberty is not the power to do as we please, but to do as we ought. License is the opposite of liberty. The Church teaches us what we ought to do and to avoid in order to serve God and be happy. The Church gives us principles to guide us in our conduct towards God, our neighbor and ourselves. She does not prescribe the place where we shall reside or the work we shall do; these she leaves to our discretion. Francis, however, wanted to be led by the Holy Spirit in all matters, and hence he took the vow of obedience. He, therefore, deprived himself of the right of having his own way in anything. He devoted his whole time to preparation for the work of the Holy Spirit and the task He might assign to him through his superiors.

Francis did nothing to shape his future. This meant extreme self-denial for human nature. He gladly gave up the dearest thing he possessed—his own free will. And strange to say he found that thereby he lost nothing worth having and gained everything. He lost the right to choose for himself only in so far as it was an obstacle. He still enjoyed liberty of the highest kind. He took the vow of obedi-

ence, not because he feared the dangerous gift of free will, not because he was selfish and wished to be free from the responsibility of deciding for himself; but he vowed obedience because it was a means to an end. It was the necessary means to remove the last obstacle in the way of the vision and perfect enjoyment of God, the Holy Ghost, our Guide. After all obstacles were removed, Francis saw only the Holy Spirit and heard only His voice to the end of his life. He saw only the invisible, infinitely wise Guide and the nothingness from which those were taken who spoke to him in His name. He watched with the interest of a man of faith the unfolding of his career.

A life of triumph is in store for every man, if only he will devote his whole time to preparation and never interfere with the arrangements of Providence. The life of Francis proves this. The life of every truly great man and woman proves the same. We can do nothing more helpful than read the lives of those who did the world's real work. Their lives will inspire us never to form selfish plans of our own or use means to turn the current of events. Francis did not consider obedience a ty-

rant who robbed him of his liberty and put him into chains. He looked upon the vow as a wonderful means of removing all uncertainty. He did not care for victory and triumph and success and fame, but all these came to him in spite of the fact that he was not a politician, in spite of the opposition of angry evil spirits, and of scheming, disappointed, unhappy men who lacked his vision, faith and sanctity.

The paradox of obedience and victory is one more puzzle to the spiritually blind and deaf, to those who do not see the Holy Spirit, who do not hear the Church speaking in His name.

Christ loved and practiced obedience. "He was obedient unto death, even unto the death of the cross." He took upon Himself the burden of the world's sins, committed because men would have their own way instead of submitting to the guidance of the Church and to lawful authority. The vision of lives wrecked by disobedience made Him sorrowful and sad. On the other hand, He saw God and He rejoiced always. His life was a divine paradox.

Francis bore the lifelong yoke of obedience. On the other hand, he saw God,

the Holy Spirit, in the Church and behind lawful authority. If men submitted their will to a fellow man for temporal gain, why should he not submit his will in faith and love to the guidance of Him who never leads astray and who rewards His own with victory and triumph in both this world and the next.

Every act he performed was in final analysis the will of the Holy Spirit and his own will besides. Every command to go to a certain place and do a certain work was but the answer to his prayer that the Infinitely Wise One would guide his every step. Had he taken his future into his own hands, he might have become a merchant and eventually the proprietor of his father's business. But he prepared himself for his work of preaching the Gospel by word and example, and the Holy Spirit used him. Francis became the greatest reformer of his age—one of the greatest reformers the world has ever known. Verily: "The obedient man shall speak of victory."

We are apt to think life uninteresting unless we can shape our own future. We consider ourselves in chains unless we are free to ask or choose; we are too impa-

"Obedience and Victory"

tient to wait for the slow, but none the less sure, developments of Providence. We are apt to consider life a game, and success a question of the survival of the fittest. But what a mistake, as we see from the life of our Saint.

The world will never cease to proclaim the victory of the obedient man of Assisi. His life, under the direction of his Divine Guide, became an adventure.

"Life's a perpetual surprise, a never-ending romance when you watch the weaving in and out of things. It keeps one attuned to the real, the lasting. It is the men that believe in mere coincidence that either never have had the spirit of romance in them or have killed it. To see God in everything makes life the greatest adventure there is." (R. H. Benson).

4

The Reformer

Francis saw and enjoyed the victories of the Holy Spirit, the result of obedience. Francis was ever in chains and ever sang the joyful song of Victory. The par-

adox of Assisi is the greatest the world has seen since the paradox of Galilee.

Francis became the reformer of his age and a reformer of all time by demonstrating the truth of the paradox, "The obedient man shall speak of victory." He told men they need not go to the extreme of taking the vow of obedience, but he declared they must see and obey the voice of the Holy Spirit by submitting to the Church and to lawful authority. He warned men that they would be successful and happy only if they submitted in all things to the visible representative of the Invisible Guide, the Church. The more obedient they were, the greater would be their victory—the greater the paradox, the greater their happiness. He who is spiritually blind and deaf considers life without any guide but his own will, because it requires no self-denial, a foretaste of heaven; a life of obedience to the Church, as a layman, because it requires self-control, a foretaste of purgatory; a life of obedience under vow as slavery and a foretaste of hell. But Francis proved that they were all wrong. He admitted that submission means crucifixion to fallen human nature, but not to the man of faith in us. He proved that

obedience and happiness are not incompatible, not a contradiction, but a paradox; and that a life with no guide but blind, selfish self, and happiness, are incompatible and a contradiction. He dethroned license and enthroned liberty. He did not envy the man who thought, said and acted as he pleased. He made men envy him. They had to admit that he, the last of men, had become the first.

Francis loved and practised obedience. He gave up his own will for life, yet he was always cheerful. A genuine reformer had appeared amongst men. He did not write a treatise on the external mission of the Holy Spirit, nor did he write a book on obedience. He saw God, the Holy Spirit, in the Church and obeyed Him, when he obeyed his superiors, and became the happiest and most successful man of his day. "Be ye followers of me," he said, "as I am of Christ." He, the ardent lover of liberty, stood at the side of the obedient Son of God and was proud of the privilege. Francis was happy and could not stand worry and unhappiness in others. If he saw an unhappy man, he would discover the cause of his unhappiness and prescribe the remedy. If he was a layman,

wandering about without a guide, he would take his hand and place it into the hand of his Mother, the Church, and bid him be obedient to her and cease to worry. If he met a religious who was unhappy, he bade him see the Holy Spirit in those who were placed over him, and assured him that obedience would make him both successful and happy in future. He was such a clear proof of what he taught that no man could resist his unselfish appeal.

"Men acted quite differently according to whether they had met him or not." (Chesterton, p. 124.)

We shall never draw men to the Church, or make them love authority, if we preach the self-denial obedience requires without preaching the victory and triumph which follows in its wake. We must preach the whole Gospel in order to win the whole man. Every child can grasp the living message of Francis; no man, however learned, can refute it. What the world needs, what it claims to be looking for in vain, what men are clamouring for, is not theoretical Christianity, but Gospel asceticism and Gospel mysticism as practised by Christ, and the most obedient and

victorious of His followers, St. Francis of Assisi.

"O happy lot! to live for worthy cause,
To which we give our all without a thought
Of fame, or gain, or the vain crowd's applause;
Heroic hearts that are not sold or bought,
But beat accordant with eternal laws,
And do the deeds by which God's will is wrought."

(J. L. Spalding.)

IX

"DESOLATE, YET MANY CHILDREN"

Gal. 4:27.

1. Seeing God, the Holy Ghost. (The internal mission of the Holy Ghost)
2. Francis
3. A Paradox
4. The Reformer

1

Seeing God, the Holy Ghost

(The Internal Mission of the Holy Ghost)

Our fourth reason for rejoicing always is the vision and enjoyment of God, the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier. Where is He? He is present in our souls as long as we are in the state of grace. His work in the Church is called, as we said, His external mission. His work in our souls is called His internal mission. How can we see the Sanctifier in us? By faith. We can not only see Him, but we can also hear His voice, reminding us always of life's main work. "This is the will of God, your sanctification." Our secondary work is to be in that place, doing that work which Providence assigned to us from all Eternity. Our main work is in that environment, to become saints, to reach that degree of union with Christ to which we are called.

We discussed the subject of the Holy Spirit, our Guide in our secondary work; let us take up the subject of the Holy

Spirit, our Guide, in the first and most important work of our lives. Our main work is to become saints before we die. It is fatal if we do not consider this self-evident, if we consider the idea of becoming saints preposterous. It is as evident that we become more perfect every day, as it is natural and evident that we develop physically, hour after hour, until we have reached maturity. We should realize that we are called to become saints here and now. We should not only know it, but we should make sanctity our chief interest in life. We are ambitious, we want to accomplish a great work, but we are apt to consider this dream the stirring of pride within us and turn aside from it as from temptation. This ambition, however, which we shall never be able to stifle, is a lawful one; it is the God-given desire to become saints before life's course is run.

Most men, I venture to say, seem to think that what we do is of paramount importance. It is important, but it is not the vital thing in our lives. Our main work is not what we do, but what we are. "Our work," says St. Charles, "is what we are." It is evident why we are apt to fall into this error. We are doing something every

moment of the day and night; it absorbs our time and attention; it is the one thing which counts with the majority of men, and eventually it is more than likely to become the one thing of importance to us. The Apostles were under the same delusion before they received the light of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel tells us of the mother who requested our Lord to place one of her sons at His right and the other at His left in the Kingdom which He was about to establish. The ten, hearing it, were moved with indignation against the two brothers so that our Lord had to pacify them. What consolation could we offer a cripple, for example, who could do nothing but menial work for life, if our main task were not what we are, but what we do? Or how would a man feel who had met with a fatal accident the day before an event for which he had prepared himself by years of patient study? It seems evident that a man, walking through the woods, is out for exercise and recreation. It may be, however, that he is out, not so much for pleasure, but to find specimens for class work. Pleasure and duty in this case would go hand in hand. We are pil-

grims in this world. Our main and secondary tasks do not clash. It may seem that our main work is what we do, but this is not the case. What we do is secondary, and our main work here on earth is to become saints in the midst of our distracting duties.

We all have the same main work to perform—our sanctification. Hence there is no reason for the jealousy and bitter rivalry in the world. "Happy the city," someone said, "whose inhabitants are rivals only in virtue." Our Lord gave us a thirty years' sermon on the subject, "Our main work is what we are," by spending almost the whole of His lifetime in obscurity. "If you are wise," writes St. Bernard, "you will not be a mere supply pipe, but a reservoir. The former lets the water flow through without retaining any itself, whilst the latter, after being itself full, and without losing a drop, pours out its superabundance to fertilize the fields." How many in the Church, devoted to apostolic works, like mere supply pipes, remain dry whilst endeavoring to impart fertility to others. "You will do something certainly," a modern author declares, "but before you can do anything that is worth doing, you

must be something. Life isn't doing, it is being. When the time comes you will do whatever is yours to do as naturally and as inevitably as the birds sing, as the blossoms come in spring or as the river finds its way to the sea."

What Christ taught us by example, He taught also in words: "I am the Vine, you are the branches. He that abideth in me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit." If a branch of a vine is alive, growing and bearing abundant fruit, it is a perfect branch of that vine; if, besides, it happens to be a branch of an arbor, which forms a shady nook in a garden on a hot summer day, it is also a useful branch. The main thing is to be a healthy, growing, fruit-bearing branch. The rest is quite secondary. My main task is to be a living, growing branch of Christ, bearing the fruit of every virtue. If, besides, I am doing some secondary work, for example, if I am a successful priest, or the father of an ideal family, I am also a useful branch of Christ, the Vine.

We have only two tasks to accomplish in life, the first to become saints, the second to do the work God expects of us. It was this teaching of our Lord which made

Him so unpopular with all but the few, who "hungered and thirsted after justice." It is this which has made the man who lives and preaches the Gospel unpopular with the superficial and insincere of every age.

Our Lord called the Scribes and Pharisees hypocrites and likened them to sepulchres white and beautiful on the outside, but within, full of rottenness and dead men's bones. They neglected man's main work—interior beauty and perfection, and laid undue stress on externals. "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you make clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but within you are full of rapine and uncleanliness. Thou blind Pharisee, first make clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, that the outside may become clean." No wonder they persecuted the Holy One, and vowed never to rest until they silenced Him, as they thought, forever. Christ's public life lasted only three years, and during this comparatively short period of time, He had to save Himself on more than one occasion by a miracle. There is no persecution so bitter as that directed against the prophet, who by example and when it

is called for, by word, proclaims the absolute necessity of interior perfection.

No man who wants to do justice to himself and to his dear ones will receive a friend into his home circle as one of the family for life, unless that man fits in perfectly. So Jesus Christ will not admit a friend into Heaven, into the Family of the Blessed, until he is flawless, perfect—a saint. "Nothing defiled shall enter Heaven." We must become perfect branches of Christ, the Vine, either in this world or the next.

St. Paul enumerates a number of gifts and deeds which men consider extraordinary; speaking with the tongues of angels, prophesy, knowing all mysteries and having all knowledge, faith strong enough to move mountains, giving all one possesses to the poor, martyrdom. He declares that all these are as nothing, unless the man in whom they are found is holy, unless he possesses that charity which makes us living, growing, fruit-bearing branches of Christ, the Vine.

But how are we going to get at the problem of becoming saints? The answer is evident. A pupil who wants to become a musician engages the best available teacher.

He takes a lesson and masters it. He takes the second and third lessons and masters them. He continues his training until he has become a great artist. It is the teacher's work to direct the course, the pupil's task to co-operate. The same is true in the school of the Holy Spirit. The Sanctifier is in us. "In Thy infinite compassion Thou hast from the first entered my soul and taken possession of it." (Newman.) He knows us, the ones to be sanctied. "He has before Him a soul's whole history from beginning to end." (Newman.) He knows just what process is required to transform us into that degree of likeness to Christ we are supposed to attain before our days are spent. He knows how much time He has in which to finish the process. There would be reason to consider it a hopeless task to transform ourselves into saints if the selection of means, if the process were left to us; but there is no excuse if the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier. "I was influenced, as I think I have told you, from my earliest years by the belief that the day's happenings, however trivial, were all a part of l'action de Dieu, that in them I could find sufficient mortification, abounding sanctification, and

a rule of conduct . . . I had been taught by my mother as a child to say: "DOMINUS EST to everything that happened." (M. Carmichael.)

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to offer us the opportunities for our sanctification, ours to accept them gratefully, and use every one of them. Our soul might be called a studio with the Holy Spirit standing over us and the picture of Christ, the Model, hanging on the wall. We need not be concerned about the Sanctifier's part in the work, nor need we fear that the means of character building will ever be lacking. Our sole concern should be, to be on the alert for the opportunities the Holy Spirit sends or permits every hour of the day to purify and sanctify us, and make us fit for union with Christ. In a word, we must not consider life a great mystery, and events as the happenings of mere chance. We must not see only persons and events, but always and only the divinely wise and merciful One behind them.

"Myself and God, my end, and all else on the face of the earth mere means to help me to that end." (Newman.)

If I interfere, the Holy Spirit will stop

the process for the time being, or proceed very slowly. His work is not to kill or crush, but to encourage and sanctify. He has given us free will and divine grace, but will not, can not proceed without our free co-operation. God created and redeemed us without our co-operation, but He will not sanctify us unless we work hand in hand with Him. The process of sanctification is described by the saints in their ascetical and mystical works; but this process may be studied concretely by reading their biographies. The saints are the masterpieces of the Holy Spirit, and their co-operation was so perfect that they were ready to meet Christ when He called them home.

"They are all choice patterns of the theological virtues; they are all blessed with a rare and special union with their Master and Lord. They all led lives of penance, and when they left this world they were spared those torments which the multitude of holy souls are allotted between earth and Heaven, death and eternity." (Newman.)

Instruments of purification and sanctification will never be lacking.

"Particular devotion to God's service infallibly entails contradiction, calumny,

injustice, and various trials from creatures; and that not only from the wicked, but even from the virtuous or at least those reputed such. Is this to be wondered at after Jesus Christ became the Victim of false devotees seated on the chair of Moses? All such trials are foreseen by God; permitted as regards their authors, willed as regards their object. They are destined for His glory and our sanctification, which they will infallibly promote, if we take Jesus Christ as the model of our sentiments and conduct. Nothing but our own opposition can render the designs of God abortive provided we co-operate with those designs. The sins of others far from impeding will contribute to our perfection; their reprobation may become the source of our salvation. How consoling this reflection." (Grou.)

It stands to reason that the process required to transform us into saints is a tremendous one. Henry Suso had undergone a series of exterior trials. He was overjoyed and said: "Henceforth I will lead a quiet life and enjoy myself." Wisdom answered: "Look upwards at the heavens above thee, and if thou canst count the countless multitude of stars, thou canst

count also the sufferings which still await thee."

The saints watched the workings of the Holy Spirit with intense interest; they realized what was going on. They never complained. They were happy. They were enthusiastic. They did not anticipate Him, on the one hand, nor did they dare to interfere. They co-operated and in the end they became masterpieces. We are inclined to pride, covetousness, lust, anger, envy, gluttony, and sloth. It is the task of the Holy Spirit to furnish us with opportunities, directly or indirectly, to crucify these inclinations and to acquire the virtues opposed to these vices. The more keenly we feel a test so much the more do we need it. Msgr. Benson claims that everything that comes into our lives is sent or permitted because we would not learn in any other way.

We have a great work to do, the time is limited and we cannot afford to trifle. If we do, we shall be at the end of our time of probation with the work unfinished. The process of spiritual transformation, I repeat it, is nothing short of crucifixion for fallen nature, but there is no reason for excessive dread of the long

drawn out ordeal or of the climax. If we but use the present opportunity for spiritual purification or growth, it will prepare us for the next and for always greater ones, with the result that we shall be ready for the final trials when they come—for Gethsemane.

"Gethsemane ain't no place," said the Dean, "it's somethin' that happens. Whenever a man goes up against himself, right there Gethsemane is. And right there too is sure to be a fight. A man may not always know about it at the time; he may be too busy fightin' to understand just what it all means; but he'll know about it afterwards. No matter what side of him wins, he'll know afterwards that it was the one big fight of his life." (H. B. Wright.)

If our work is what we are, who then is doing the greatest work in the world today? The greatest living saint, even if he or she should happen to be a helpless, hopeless invalid. "If a person were paralysed, perfectly helpless, blind, deaf and dumb, and still resigned to the Will of God, intimately united to Him, such a person would do more for the Church than all the activity of those who labor for the

Church and are less united to God." (Curtis.)

It is evident that if a great saint is at the same time a great worker, such a one would be the first of the first. A saint, by his mere presence in the world, is a constant living prayer of adoration, thanksgiving, propitiation, and petition. As the world becomes a different place to one who has found the rare gift of a real friend, so the world assumes a different aspect in the eyes of God because of the presence of one genuine saint. One saint is a blessing in a family, in a city, in a country, in the world.

"One saint is worth a million ordinary Catholics." (Faber.)

The Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier, Christ the Vine, and we the branches. The Sanctifier is ideal, the Vine is ideal, but the branches are, in consequence of the Fall, and often because of inheritance, lack of training, environment, and personal sins and their effects, anything but ideal. To realize this is our only hope, if there is to be any real and lasting and interior change. To realize and admit our condition is the beginning of conversion.

The one insidious enemy we have is fallen nature—lower self. We give many causes for not becoming perfect, and claim that they are all outside of ourselves. We blame persons and conditions, but there is only one who is to blame if we fail, and that one is within—it is self.

It is an epoch in our lives when we discover the Holy Spirit, and self, the one and only one who can prevent us from becoming, under His direction, perfect branches of Christ, the Vine. What we call causes interfering with the work of spiritual regeneration are only occasions which would become aids if only lower self were crucified and higher self made the proper use of them. "To those that love God all things work together unto good."

"All seek the things that are their own," says St. Paul. A terrible indictment. That means that the ego in us wants to be the center of the universe instead of Christ, that self divides mankind into three classes, and will, if he can, make the lives of those with whom he has to deal a foretaste of heaven, hell or purgatory, according to the attitude they take to this "little god." This is no exaggeration. We may

not realize it, but our conduct before our spiritual conversion proves that St. Paul's claim is only too true. "All seek the things that are their own, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's."

"The selfish man looks at everything from his own point of view; he seeks himself in everything; it seems to him as if the whole universe and all creatures and even God Himself only existed on his account. He has no esteem or love for others except in proportion to the esteem and friendship they show to him." (Grou.)

Jesus Christ is the center of the universe. Of ourselves we are nothing. We are only what He made us. The millions grouped around this Divine Center are branches of the Vine. Christ wants us to treat our fellowmen, not as they deserve, but as we would treat Him if he appeared in our midst. He wants all men to treat us in like manner. But if men treat us as we deserve, as nothing and sinners, we who are going through the process of spiritual transformation ought to be grateful to God indeed. Those who so treat us will be the sufferers, we the gainers.

If it is true that self is the only enemy we have, we ought to direct all our ven-

geance against this criminal. We ought not to rest until he has been captured and reduced to helplessness. St. Paul bids us deal with him as the worst criminals were dealt with in his day—to crucify him. "They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh with its vices and concupiscences."

It is clear that there are so many failures in the spiritual life because men do not see the Sanctifier behind every person and happening, sending or permitting all for their good; because they do not crucify and silence self; because they are not grateful for every opportunity; because they do not use them and let them have the effect for which they were sent or permitted. Even if we do not know and can not imagine why a test was sent or permitted, it will do its work in us if we accept it rightly. The same trial comes into two lives. The one man takes the right, the other the wrong attitude; one comes out of it a more perfect, the other a more imperfect man. Trials are not the cause of failure, they are only the occasions. "Mishaps are like knives, that either serve us or cut as we grasp them by the blade or the handle." (Lowell.) Thank God, it rests with us to transform everything

that happens into a help. It is not so rare to find those who are willing and even anxious to perform acts of self-denial of their own choosing, but there are few who welcome the tests which the Holy Spirit sends or permits; and yet these are the ones which constitute the most important part in the process of sanctification.

"Observe that we gain more in a single day by trials which come to us from God and our neighbor than we would in ten years by penance and exercises we take upon ourselves." (St. Theresa.)

In God-sent trials self has no part; in the acts of self-crucifixion which we choose, self is likely to enter and rob them of almost all of their sanctifying value. When the daily trials of life come, opportunities precious beyond words, we say, "Yes, I deserve Hell in general, but not this trial in particular." (Benson) We refuse to submit to the process of the Sanctifier; and remain but the product of all the influences, good and bad, which have entered into our lives. We never change interiorly, we never grow; at the end of a lifetime we are more or less what we were when we began; we remain imperfect branches of Christ the Vine, unfit to lead a life of

close union with Jesus Christ in this world, and in need of a long and painful process of purification in the world to come.

The saints denied themselves in many ways, but what they valued most of all were the purifying and sanctifying trials of life for which they were not responsible. They actually said "Thanks" without even a moment's hesitation, for everything that happened. They were grateful for joys, not because they were agreeable, but because they were helpful; they were equally grateful for trials, not because they were trials, but because they were means of self-improvement.

"We lost the true notion of culture," someone said, "when we threw away the Lives of the Saints." We put them aside because we misunderstand the most important lesson they convey. We read the biography of a saint and we learn that he thanked God for everything. We take up a second and third life and after reading a few chapters, become discouraged and feel that the time will never come when we shall be able to be as sincerely grateful for all as they were; we think that we shall do well to be resigned; but in reality there is no cause for discouragement. Suppose a

saint was insulted, he did not thank the person who insulted him; he did not thank for the insult for its own sake; he thanked the Holy Spirit for the opportunity of overcoming self; he used it and rejoiced, because he realized that he was thereby becoming a more perfect branch of Christ, the Vine.

Sometimes the saints protested under injustice, never to cater to self, however, but only because circumstances required it. They made it their life's work to co-operate with the Sanctifier and were ever on the alert for opportunities. They never missed an occasion to crucify self or to grow spiritually. If they failed they realized it and were very sorry, learned the lesson and resolved against a similar mistake in the future. The sin of which they were afraid was that of not co-operating with the Sanctifier. They grew and developed spiritually day by day, until they finally reached "the age of the fulness of Christ." Needless to say, their lives became very interesting. The most exciting life without interior development is dull; the most uneventful life, that of a contemplative, is most interesting when interior development is constantly going on.

"The devil is always trying to make religion dull. It is the only interesting thing in the world and full of romance and adventure and happiness. Selfishness is the foundation of everything, and as soon as we get rid of self, God comes in, and this is the greatest possible joy." (Benson)

Self-indulgence seems sweet, but the reaction is always bitter; self-crucifixion seems bitter, but the reaction is always sweet. When we have learned this lesson, we have taken the first step in the solution of the problem of life. "All pleasure must be bought at the price of pain. The difference between false pleasure and true is just this: for the true, the price is paid before you enjoy it; for the false, after you enjoy it." (John Foster) St. Lidwine, who with great joy, underwent almost incredible sufferings, not only for herself, but also because she was chosen by God as a victim of expiation, declared: "The consolations which I experience are proportionate to the trials I endure, and I find them so exquisite that I would not exchange them for all the pleasures of man."

The world has many would-be reformers. They all prescribe a change of conditions instead of a change of attitude.

We must try to ameliorate conditions, but sometimes they can not be changed. The true reformer will inspire us to thank the Holy Spirit for everything that happens because it is an opportunity, he will urge us to use all for the purpose for which it was sent or permitted; finally he will have us rejoice over the result—closer union with Christ. The successful reformer is the man who can impart to his fellowmen the enthusiasm required to live up to this ideal.

The true pupil of the Holy Spirit is the real Christian Scientist. He does not deny the existence of trials and sufferings; he admits that they are real, but he knows how to take the sting out of them and transform them into blessings. Only when we see the Holy Spirit at work within us and use all that happens for our good, only when we co-operate with Him; then and only then can we truly say that every day we are growing better in every way.

Couè merely prescribes a formula, he does not tell us who sends or permits all; he does not tell us about fallen nature, our one real enemy; he does not tell us what the result will be if we accept all in the ideal way, the result in this world and

the next. He never rises above the natural. He never mentions the supernatural.

Ambitious people are turning to exponents of applied psychology for a philosophy of life. The leaders of this movement deny the Fall of man. They claim that man can become anything he wills to become without supernatural aid. "This subject is as safely handled," someone said, "without the knowledge of the Sanctifier and His work, as T.N.T. by a schoolboy."

True asceticism and mysticism lay due stress upon the Fall and its consequences; but since we have a Divine Person for a Redeemer and a Divine Person for a Sanctifier, and since we are called to become perfect branches of Christ, the Vine, "partakers," as St. Peter puts it, "of the Divine Nature," they give the Fall of man the paradoxical name of "Felix Culpa." To the true ascetic and mystic there is no problem of evil. He never asks: "Why must I suffer?" He sees in joys and trials alike means to develop in himself, before he meets God face to face, a perfect Christlike character. We shall be amazed to see in Eternity what a life of oppor-

tunities we have had and what great holiness we might have attained had we used them with the all-powerful help of the Holy Spirit. The only really normal person in the world is he who is leading a life of union with Christ; the one who allows nothing to sever, weaken or even disturb that union. Grievous sin severs union with Christ, venial sin weakens it, and joys and trials disturb it, unless we refuse to allow them to come between Him and ourselves. We must, in the midst of joys and trials, cling to Christ and thus prove that we want the Giver, not so much His gifts, certainly not for their own sake; that He is just as dear to us whether we are enjoying His blessings or whether we are deprived of them; that the possession of His gifts or the loss of them does not really matter. The spiritually normal man is the one in whose life there is nothing negative, in whose life everything is constructive. "To those that love God all things work together unto good."

"This world depends on you and me,
The power of the throng in which we live
Depends on what each one of us will give

Of his own life, to make the whole
world sound;
The destiny of human kind is found
In you and me.

And Heaven depends on us, on you and
me,
For each small action of our tiny strife
Brings God more glory and ourselves
more life;
And endless Heaven will be made more
bright
If earth has yielded one more man of
right
In you and me."

2

Francis

St. Francis saw the Holy Spirit in his soul, using persons and happenings as means to purify and sanctify him, to make him a perfect branch of Christ, the Vine. He realized that our main work is not what we do. "Those who are set over others," he said, "should glory in their

superiority only as much as if they had been deputed to wash the feet of the brothers." He understood that our work is what we are. He saw the infinitely wise Sanctifier in his soul awaiting his co-operation in the great work of transforming him into the great saint he was destined to become. He saw the Model, Christ, into whose image he was to become transformed. He expected a long and trying process. He discovered that fallen human nature, self, was the one obstacle in the way of success. "All evil comes from within," he once said. On another occasion he declared: "There is none in the world who can possess a single virtue if he does not die to himself." He therefore used every opportunity sent or permitted by the Sanctifier to crucify his evil inclinations.

He struck the first deadly blow to lower self by overcoming his horror of leprosy. Seeing a victim coming along the road, he greeted and embraced him. "Now on a day while he was riding over the plain that lieth beneath the city of Assisi, he met a certain leper, and this unforeseen meeting filled him with loathing. But when he recalled the purpose of perfection that he

had even then conceived in mind, and remembered that it behoved him first of all to conquer self, if he were fain to become the soldier of Christ, he leapt from his horse and ran to embrace him. When the leper stretched forth his hand as though to receive an alms, he kissed it, and then put money therein. Then forthwith mounting his horse, he looked round him on all sides, and the plain was spread before him unbroken, and no trace of that leper could he see. Then, filled with wonder and joy, he began devoutly to chant praises unto the Lord, purposing from this to rise ever unto greater heights." (St. Bonaventure)

St. Francis was not a sentimentalist; he did not allow himself to be swayed by emotion. He did not try to devise a system of asceticism or mysticism of his own. He followed Christ by the path of self-denial. He obeyed safe guides in the spiritual life and never went astray. Francis was always sorrowful, because always engaged in the work of self-crucifixion; always rejoicing, because of the many opportunities to do so. "Suppose," he once said, "I am a prelate set over the brethren and I go to the Chapter to preach and admonish them, and at the end of my dis-

course they tell me I am not fit to be over them, that I do not know how to speak, that I am illiterate, foolish and simple. Suppose that I am then cast out with shame, amidst the derision of all. I tell thee that unless I endure these things with an even countenance and even gladness of heart, I am not a true Friar Minor."

The man who preaches and lives up to such a standard has ceased to live a life of resentment; he has begun a life of everlasting gratitude.

Francis did not interfere with the work of the Holy Spirit. The Sanctifier could go on with the purifying and sanctifying process day by day. He co-operated wholeheartedly with the Transformer of souls within him. He did not consider the goal, sanctity, too high. He realized that sanctification is life's main work; and watched his interior development with keen interest. He became spiritually normal. Nothing could separate him from Christ; nothing could weaken the union between himself and Christ, the Vine; nothing could so much as disturb it. Everything served the purpose of bringing him closer to Jesus Christ.

"You could not threaten to starve a

man, who is ever striving to fast. You could not ruin him and reduce him to beggary, for he was already a beggar. There was a very lukewarm satisfaction even in beating him with a stick, when he only indulged in little leaps and cries of joy because indignity was his only dignity. You could not put his head in a halter without the risk of putting it in a halo." (Chesterton, p. 152)

Francis detected the flaw in the spiritual life of those who prayed, and practised voluntary self-denial, and refused to co-operate in the tests sent or permitted by the Sanctifier Himself. He once declared: "Many are faithful at prayer, practice bodily abstinence and bodily mortification, but let them suffer an injury, let them be deprived of something, and they will be immediately offended and troubled."

Francis, the docile, the grateful and enthusiastic pupil of the Holy Spirit, advanced by leaps and bounds towards the goal set for him. After he had completely crucified self, after the work of interior development was finished, the Sanctifier saw fit to crucify him physically by imprinting on his body five wounds like those of his Master. The man of Assisi became

in soul and body a perfect replica of the Man of Galilee. Francis could exclaim at last: "Not I live, but Christ liveth in me."

"There is a mortal, who is now above
In the mid-glory; he, when near to die,
Was given communion with the Crucified,—
Such that the Master's very wounds were stamped
Upon his flesh; and from the agony
Which thrilled through body and soul in that embrace,
Learned that the flame of Everlasting Love
Doth burn ere it transform." (Newman)

Francis wrote the famous "Canticle of the Sun," in which he calls upon his brothers and sisters, the sun, the moon, and the stars, winds, fire, earth and water, to praise God. Toward the end of his life he added a verse in praise of Death:
"Praise be Thou, O Lord, for our Sister Death."

As Francis lay on his death bed, one of his brothers reproached him for being so cheerful in the face of death and judgment. Francis replied: "By the grace of

the Holy Spirit, I am so completely united to my Lord and my God that I may well be allowed to rejoice and be glad in Him." Francis died on the third of October, 1226, in the forty-fifth year of his age and the twentieth of his conversion.

"Little men borrow all their importance from their actions, which they accomplish. Without these actions, they would be absolutely nothing. . . . They have no real substance. They are phantoms and will disappear." (Hello)

Francis accomplished great things, but it is not so much what he did as what he was, that made him great in the sight of God and man. It is this that makes the world remember him on this the seven hundredth anniversary of his death, and will make men remember him to the end of time.

Francis was not an organizer in the accepted sense of the word, but he was an organizer like Christ, his Master. "I am the Vine," Our Lord said, "and you are the branches." Francis wanted his brethren to become one and remain one by the simple process of Gospel asceticism and mysticism. He realized that there can be perfect and lasting unity only when mem-

bers of an organization are one in Christ. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the sheep and the lion shall abide together and a little child shall lead them."

3

A Paradox

The world's great sin of omission is not to strive for sanctity. Every man ought to be a saint at the hour of death. The Sanctifier is ever present in us; the opportunities which will make us saints, if we co-operate, are at our very feet. The average man is supposed to become a saint in the world. This is his main work. His secondary duty is to rear a family. By this I mean, not merely to give life to children, to feed and clothe them; but above all, to train them for sanctity, especially by his example. This is the point great men realized so well. When his first child was born, Frederick Ozanam wrote: "I can not think of this imperishable soul,

of which I shall have to render an account, without feeling myself penetrated with my duties. How could I dare to teach her lessons which I did not practice. Could God have found a kinder way of instructing me and correcting me and setting my feet on the road to Heaven?"

Parenthood is a great responsibility, but also a great joy. Francis entered the religious state, the state of perfection. By entering religion, he pledged himself to make it the business of his life to strive for perfection and to inspire men to do the same by his prayers, word and example. It was extreme self-denial for a man as human as St. Francis to forego the joy and privilege of parenthood. He remained "desolate." But he soon discovered that he had given up parenthood only in so far as it was a disturbance. He did not become a religious because he wanted to shirk the responsibility of rearing a family; he was not a coward; nor did he take the step for its own sake. It was just a means to an end. It was the necessary means to remove the last obstacle in the way of the vision and perfect enjoyment of the Holy Spirit in his soul.

After he had entered the State of Per-

fection, the Religious Life, Francis saw the Holy Spirit in every person and happening; saw Him sending or permitting all to bring forth in him, with his cooperation, the most beautiful of children —the Child Divine. "The throes and pangs of spiritual birth," writes St. Francis de Sales, "are painful to nature; our souls must give birth, both exteriorly and interiorly, to the sweetest and most pleasing, the most beautiful Child that could be imagined. It is the good Jesus we must form within ourselves. Courage! We must suffer much that He may be born within us."

The one-time thoughtless youth of Assisi became the most Christlike Saint of history. He not only brought forth Christ in himself, but he became the spiritual father of the largest family of spiritual children in the Church. The three branches of the Order of St. Francis have given the Church more saints and blessed men and women than any other Order.

A religious who deprives himself of the joys of fatherhood is called unnatural by those who do not understand. But this is not the case, because he makes the sacrifice for a greater good. The joy of

spiritual fatherhood is of a higher order, and therefore more than makes up for the joys of the happy father of an ideal family. Francis was the happiest, the most normal of men, in spite of being "desolate."

He was the father of many children. The interest of a father in his children can not compare with Francis' interest in his spiritual sons and daughters. Like Christ, he took interest in individuals.

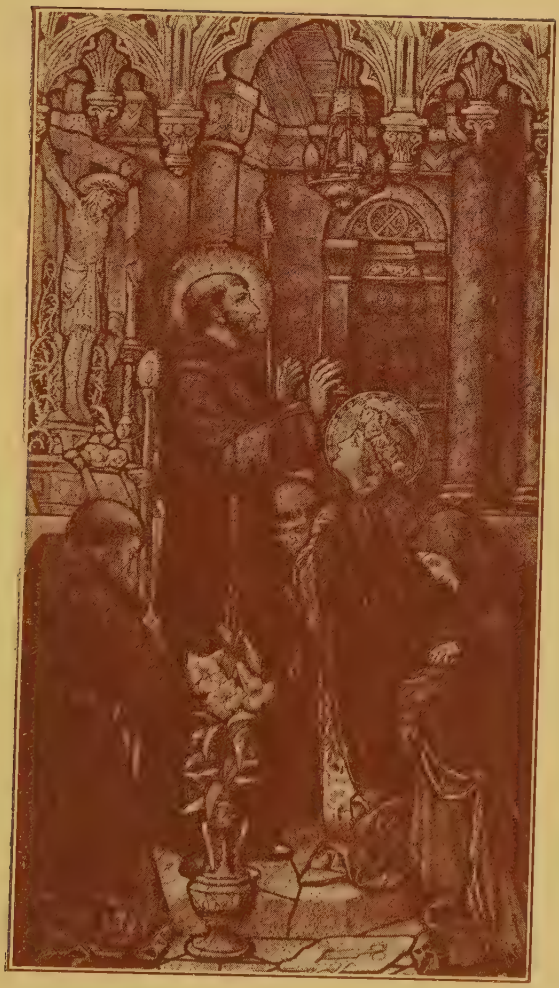
"St. Francis did not love humanity, but men, so he did not love Christianity, but Christ. What gave him his extraordinary personal power was this, that from the Pope to the beggar, from the Sultan of Syria in his pavilion to the ragged robbers crawling out of the wood, there was never a man who looked into those brown, burning eyes, without being certain that Francis Bernardone was really interested in him; in his own inner individual life, from the cradle to the grave; that he himself was being valued and taken seriously and not merely added to the spoils of some social policy or the names in some clerical document." (Chesterton, p. 141)

We know how profoundly the world of St. Francis' day was influenced by personal

contact with him, or by his spirit. Dante, for example, placed in his lowest hell those who in life were melancholy and repined without cause. The followers of Francis were not fanatics, but normal men from every walk of life, who were seeking happiness; men who were willing to pay the price, convinced that he would not disappoint them.

Jesus Christ was the Holy One; it was not necessary in His case to go through the process of sanctification. He could not, therefore, be a model for us in the work of transformation from sinners and imperfect men into saints. His crucifixion did not mean crucifying evil inclinations; it meant the agony caused by the vision of countless sinful lives, of lives of lukewarmness and indifference. He was a Man of sorrows. On the other hand, He saw God always and rejoiced. His life was a divine paradox.

Francis, too, was always sorrowful. His life, on the one hand, was a long drawn-out process of crucifixion for the "old man," and on the other hand, a life of rejoicing always for the "new man"; because he saw the Sanctifier always directing the complicated, uninterrupted life-



"Desolate, Yet Many Children"

long process of purification and sanctification. After the Paradox of Galilee there is none more helpful than the Paradox of Assisi.

4

The Reformer

St. Francis became the reformer of his age, and a world-reformer by demonstrating the paradox: "Desolate, yet many children." He told men that they were not obliged to go as far as he did by depriving themselves of the joy of parenthood. It was not necessary for them to enter the religious state and thereby pledge themselves in a special way to strive for perfection. But he did not hesitate to tell his fellowmen that they must become saints before they can enter Heaven; and that it is the work of the Holy Spirit, with their co-operation, to finish the task of purification and sanctification before they meet their Judge, Jesus Christ, the perfect Vine.

Francis assured those who followed him, that they would not be happy unless

they made life a paradox—a life of self-crucifixion, in order that Christ might be born and grow and reign within them. He declared that the greater the conquest over self, the greater the victory for Christ and the greater the measure of that peace and joy which the world can not give or take away. Those who are spiritually blind and deaf, who neither see nor hear the Sanctifier, look upon a life of self-indulgence — of spiritual and physical birth-control—because it requires no self-denial, as a foretaste of heaven; they look upon the work of sanctifying themselves and those to whom they have given life, because it requires self-control, as a foretaste of purgatory; and upon a life devoted exclusively to the sanctification of themselves and their spiritual children, because it requires perfect self-control, as a foretaste of hell. But Francis proved that they were wrong. They were right in so far as fallen human nature is concerned; but he proved that they were mistaken so far as higher self, the man of faith within us is concerned. He proved that happiness and the ascetical and mystical life are not incompatible; that they are a paradox, not a contradiction, and

that a life of happiness and self-indulgence are incompatible and contradictory. He dethroned self and enthroned Jesus Christ; he did not envy the sinner and the lukewarm; he made them envy him. They could not but see that their former leader was becoming a greater hero than one who conquers cities—a saint among saints.

Francis practised what he preached. Men had to admit that an ideal reformer had arisen in their midst. Francis did not write a treatise on the Internal Mission of the Holy Spirit; he did not write a work on asceticism and mysticism; he saw God the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, and joyfully submitted to the process of sanctification, and thereby became a man in whom not self, but Christ lived; through whom not self, but Christ spoke: "Be ye followers of me," he could truly say, "as I am of Christ." He, the crucified man, stood at the side of the crucified God-man, Jesus Christ, and was proud of the distinction.

Francis was unspeakably happy and could not bear to see men unhappy. The process of putting off the "old man" and putting on the "new man" did not make

him dismal or dehumanized; for it was the whole meaning of his message, that such mysticism makes a man cheerful and humane. If a restless and unhappy man came to Francis for relief, he would not rest until he had diagnosed the trouble, until he had prescribed the remedy, until the man had found happiness and peace. If the man had driven the Sanctifier from his soul by grievous sin, he would induce him to go to Confession; if his unhappiness was due to conditions, to so-called unbearable conditions, he made him realize that no conditions, however trying, can make a man unhappy; that, on the contrary, they are God-sent opportunities to change us from sinners into saints, from imperfect men into perfect branches of Christ, the Vine.

Francis, by his example, taught the world that a life of perfect union with Christ is our normal condition, that we ought to be perfect branches if we are part of a perfect Vine; that we must allow nothing to sever, to weaken or even disturb the union between the Vine and the branches. Only when we have learned the secret of using all that happens as a means of bringing us closer to Christ, only then

can we expect the reward which will be ours, even in this world—perfect joy.

"Now once on a time it happened that Francis set out to walk with Brother Leo from the Hill-city of Perugia to the convent of St. Mary of the Angels. And as they went along the high hill-road, there came upon them a bitter wind and a heavy fall of snow; and Brother Leo, as he walked in front, was fain to shiver and complain of the cruel cold.

"Now when Francis saw that his countenance was sad and his steps heavy in their going, he cried after him and said, 'O Brother Leo, even if the Brothers Minor should make the blind to see, the lame to walk, and the deaf to hear, and even to raise one from the dead, remember that in all this there is no perfect joy.'

"But Brother Leo only grunted, for he was cold and heavy of heart. After a little while Francis called to him again: 'O Brother Leo, if the Friars Minor knew all that was in the world, all books and languages and science and the Scriptures, not to speak of the secrets of men's souls, be it known that in all this there is not perfect joy.'

"But Brother Leo only shook his head

and sighed, for he was colder than ever and very weary.

"After they had gone a little farther, Francis called again: 'O Brother Leo, thou little sheep of God, if the Friars Minor spoke with the tongues of angels and knew all the secrets of the earth, of birds and beasts and fishes, of men and trees and stones and waters, know that not in this will be found the secret of perfect joy.'

"But Brother Leo only looked upon the ground, for his feet were frozen and his heart was sad.

"Then once again, after a little space, Francis called aloud: 'O Brother Leo, even if the Friars Minor were to preach so well that they should convert the whole world, yet know that herein is not perfect joy.'

"Now, when they had covered more than two miles of the high-hill road, in the discourse Brother Leo began to be astonished and to wonder what he meant. So he called over his shoulder to Francis and said: 'I pray thee tell me, Father, for God's sake, wherein is perfect joy?'

"And Francis answered and said: 'Suppose we come to St. Mary of the Angels, soaked with snow, and frozen with cold,

hungry and weary, and that when we knock eagerly at the door the porter shall come and say, in an angry voice: 'Who may you be?' Suppose that when we reply 'we are two of the Brothers,' he should say, 'You lie; for you are two good-for-nothing beggars who are known to steal the bread of the poor. Get along with you,' and should slam the door in our face. Then, if we should bear that patiently, and going into the wind and snow should think humbly that after all the porter had but truly described us, then, O Brother Leo, we should have found the Secret of Perfect Joy.

'And if we should return and knock again, and, weeping, beg him to open to us for the love of God, and if he should cry out angrily: 'I will pay these rascals what they deserve,' and rush out with a great stick and seize us by the hoods and roll us in the snow and beat us well, then, if we bear all this with patience, thinking of the pains of the Blessed Jesus and all that He bore for us—then, O Brother Leo, know that there is perfect joy.

'For he who has learned to conquer himself and to bear all pain and grief will-

ingly for the dear Christ, has found the Secret of Perfect Joy.'

"And then did Brother Leo understand so that he complained no more within himself, but walked on gladly through the snow and wind till he reached that journey's end."

This conversation of Francis with Brother Leo is the key to the Christlike spirituality of the Little Man of Assisi.

We shall never succeed in creating enthusiasm for man's main work—sanctification, if we preach only half of the Gospel, if we speak of self-denial in the wrong way; we shall fail unless we speak of self-crucifixion as a prelude to a glorious resurrection.

Francis was an ideal reformer because he preached his message in a way that none could gainsay or misunderstand. His life was a sermon, a living message. "Pollyanna" is an impossible creation. It is a hopeless attempt to preach the glad life without the glad tidings of the Gospel. As long as we must remain on earth, self-denial will be the measure of our happiness. Only in Heaven will our life cease to be a paradox.

The Little Flower played the "Glad

Game" and what she did in her "little way," Francis did in a big way. What the world needs is not less of the theory of true asceticism and mysticism, but more living examples: "By their fruits you shall know them." It wants to see more true followers of Jesus Christ, the Holy One; more followers of St. Francis of Assisi. The Gospel contains the secret of peace and happiness and joy, but it will remain a secret to us and to the world unless we live it. The true philosophy of life is also the most cheerful.

"Count each affliction, whether light or grave,
God's messenger sent down to thee; do thou
With courtesy receive him; rise and bow;
And, ere his shadow pass thy threshold, crave
Permission first his heavenly feet to lave;
Then lay before him all thou hast; allow
No cloud of passion to usurp thy brow,
Or mar thy hospitality; no wave
Of mortal tumult to obliterate
Thy soul's marmoreal calmness; grief should be
Like joy, majestic, equable, sedate,

Confirming, cleansing, raising, making
free;
Strong to consume small troubles; to
command
Great thoughts, grave thoughts, thoughts
lasting to the end."

(Aubrey de Vere)

X

THE HERALD OF THE GREAT KING

Jesus Christ is the King of the world. He is the One and only Eternal King. He is the King of Kings. Had man not sinned, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity would have, we are told, become incarnate. His reign would have been one of glory and triumph. Since man fell, however, His life became a paradox—"suffering, yet always rejoicing." He, the Innocent One, suffered interior and exterior crucifixion as only the human nature of a Divine Person could endure. He became the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. At the same time He rejoiced always as only One who is Divine could rejoice in this world, because He always enjoyed the Beatific Vision. His life was a divine paradox and He—the Paradox of Galilee. He came not only to redeem us, but to be our Model; hence the command: "Follow Me." He wanted us to walk in His footsteps, which means

that He wanted our life, like His, to be a paradox—a life of suffering and rejoicing.

We can deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Christ. On the other hand, we can see God by faith. We can make our life a paradox, but at most, a perfect human paradox. The Paradox of Assisi is the most perfect paradox since the Paradox of Galilee.

Francis, by his example, taught the world how to walk in the footsteps of Christ. "Be ye followers of me," he could say, "as I am of Christ." He believed in theory, but much more in practise. "Man," he once said, "has as much knowledge as is executed." A legend tells us how a saint once saw in vision a procession of apostles, virgins and martyrs, all walking carefully and scrutinizing the ground with earnestness, that they might tread as near as possible in the footsteps of Christ. At the end of this pageant came the shabby, little brown-robed and bare-footed figure of St. Francis; and he alone was walking easily and steadily in the actual footsteps of Our Lord. Francis followed the poor, the chaste, the obedient, the Holy One of Galilee. He practised

extreme self-denial and he was always extremely happy. He felt the trials of exile, but at the same time he saw the Creator and Preserver everywhere, and heard His voice. He saw his Lover and his All in the Blessed Sacrament; he led a life of perfect union with Him and always heard His voice. He saw his Divine Guide in the Church; he heard His voice and obeyed. He saw the Sanctifier in his soul and made it his life's business to co-operate with Him in the work of his own sanctification and that of his fellowmen.

The price we must pay to see God is a sinless life, a life of self-crucifixion. The cleaner and holier our lives, the clearer the vision. "Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God." Francis saw God. Did he pay too great a price for the privilege? No man speaks of the price paid for blessings which are priceless. Francis did not consider the cost, but only the blessings received. He did not, like the young man in the Gospel, go away sad, when he heard the condition required to possess life in its fulness. He gave up what men call all (nothing in reality) with a song upon his lips and received infinite blessings. A sinless life and

a life of self-denial, do not spell unhappiness. They produce real happiness; happiness now and in the life to come. The victim of sin and self-indulgence is the unhappy man. The sinner who is spiritually blind and deaf, who does not know the purpose of created things, who does not see and hear the Creator and Preserver; the man who is unspeakably lonely because he has not found Jesus Christ his companion and support in exile; the man who has no guide to lead him from earth to Heaven, because he has not discovered the Holy Spirit in His Church; the man whose life is almost unbearable because he does not know the Sanctifier, Who sends or permits all for his good; the man who sees only himself and lives for himself only—this is the world's unhappy man. The rich, sad young man of the Gospel, the poor young happy man of Assisi—what a contrast! Francis did not turn away from the light, he welcomed it, and with the light of the Holy Spirit he grasped the meaning of those words, "I am come that they may have life and may have it more abundantly."

Francis found God. He understood the Gospel and he preached the whole Gospel.

No wonder he did not go astray. No wonder he was so sure of his way. No wonder his true followers can be recognized today.

"He who desires nothing but God," writes St. John of the Cross, "does not walk in darkness, however blind and poor he may think himself to be; and he who indulges in no presumptuous thoughts, nor seeks his own satisfaction, either in God or in creatures, who does not serve his own will in anything, is in no danger of falling, or in any need of counsel." Francis preached self-denial, but only as a necessary means to sanctification and the joy which follows in its wake. Hence, it is not to be wondered at that everybody is running after the man of Assisi; that he is called "Everybody's St. Francis."

"St. Francis delivered a message for all men and for all times. His life was not compassed by its circumstances; nor was its effect limited to the thirteenth century. His life partakes of the Eternal and Universal, and might move men in times to come as simply and directly as it turned men's hearts to love in the years when Francis was treading the rough stones of Assisi." (Osborne Taylor)

Thomas of Celano, the first historian of our Saint, tells us that at the time of St. Francis, the Gospel teaching had been forgotten almost everywhere. The same is true in our day. Wealth, lust, contempt for authority, an inordinate desire for honors, the lack of interior perfection, are the great evils of our day. It is our duty to carry on the work begun by St. Francis. "The Blessed Francis was sent by God to preach the Gospel by his example." (Celano) We shall succeed only if we use his method. We shall never be true followers of Christ, or preach the Gospel successfully if we go about with sad countenances. We must be sorrowful, but at the same time we must rejoice always; we must make our lives a paradox.

"We shall not be like our Divine Saviour if our countenances are sad and our voices mournful." (Manning)

Unless we realize that life here below will always be a combination of joy and sorrow, the paradox, "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," will ever be to us a puzzle and a contradiction. We shall be slaves of God, rather than children of God and brethren of Christ. But if we follow the poor, the pure, the obedient, the holy and

"The Herald of the Great King"

happy man of Assisi, we shall, at the same time, be followers of Christ, and we shall not walk in darkness. "I am the light of the world; he that followeth Me walketh not in darkness." St. Francis and his first followers were men of great austerity; at the same time they were the happiest of men, which fact won for them the title, "Jesters of the Lord." "What are we, God's servants," exclaimed Francis, "but His troubadours, who seeks to uplift men's hearts and to move them to spiritual joy."

The world has seen only one Francis. There is no need of another, if only we will, in our limited sphere, do what Francis did for mankind. The Gospel teaching is sublime, practical, perfect, but the universal cry is for more of it in actual life. We must see in created things only the means to know, love and serve God better; we must really find Christ, our All; we must see in the Church, and in our superiors the representatives of the Holy Spirit, our Guide; we must see in our souls the Sanctifier and live up to our faith, then we shall be happy indeed—the only really happy men on earth. We shall make religion irresistible, the only effective way of competing with the world. Then we, too,

shall become reformers, not blind leaders of the blind.

The Gospel will endure, but it will not prosper unless we live up to our faith; "the evidence," as St. Paul calls it, "of things that appear not." "This is the victory that overcometh the world, our faith." The supremely happy, human St. Francis has had the world at his feet for centuries. Catholics and non-Catholics alike, love no place on earth next to Galilee more than they love Assisi.

Men know the story of St. Francis. Yet they wonder how he could be happy in spite of the extreme self-denial which he practised. How explain the contradiction, they ask; and to one and all Francis replies: "My life was not a puzzle, not a mystery, but a demonstration of the simple life of Jesus Christ, my Model; a blending of the spirit and the letter of the Gospel; my life was not a contradiction, but merely a paradox."

XI

EPILOGUE

God, the Father, created us and preserves us. God, the Son, redeemed us. God, the Holy Ghost, is in the Church to guide us; He is in our souls to sanctify us, with our co-operation. Father and Son put us into the hands of the Sanctifier in order that He might transform us and make us fit for a life of union with Christ on earth, fit to become one with Him when we receive the Blessed Sacrament, fit to become one with Him forever. Union with Jesus Christ is the essence of asceticism and mysticism. "I am the Vine, you are the branches."

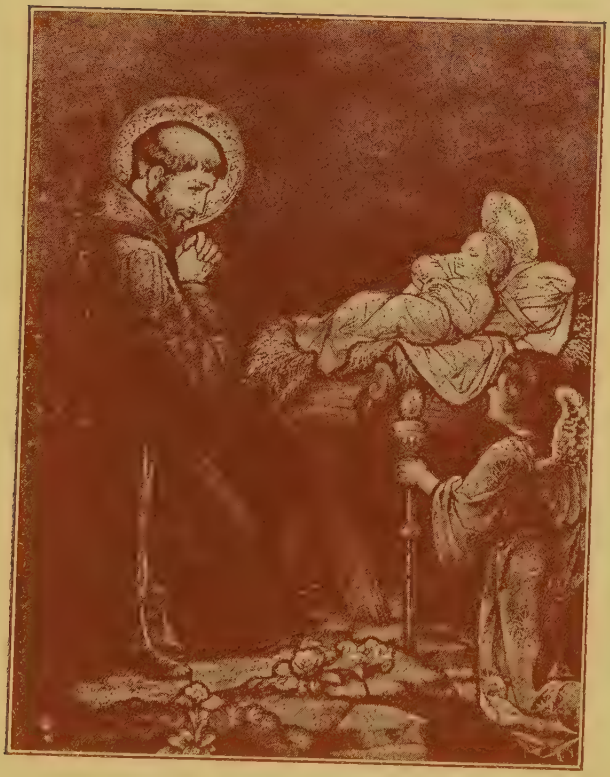
We must co-operate with the Sanctifier in the work of spiritual transformation until we can truthfully say: "Not I live, but Christ liveth in me. For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." "Never dissatisfied, forever unsatisfied" must be our motto until we see Him face to face, until

we find perfect happiness at last, until our life ceases to be a paradox and becomes one of unalloyed eternal bliss.

Jesus Christ is our All. He, and He alone can dispel our gloom and fully satisfy the craving of our hearts for time and for eternity.

"Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee
Save Me, save only Me?
All which I took from thee I did but take,
Not for thy harms,
But just that thou mightst seek it in My arms.
All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home;
Rise, clasp My hand and come!

Halts by me that footfall;
Is my gloom after all
Shade of His hand outstretched caressingly?
'Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He whom thou seekest;
Thou dravest Love from thee, who dravest Me.'" (Francis Thompson)



"The Man Who Saw God"

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